

# Hednesford Pentecostal Church

## The Book of Proverbs

Unless otherwise stated all Bible references are taken from “*The Holy Bible, new King James Version*”, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, inc.) 1982.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. PURPOSE

The purpose of the Book of Proverbs is clearly defined in the first few verses.

Prov 1:2-6. To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, {3} to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity; {4} to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion; {5} a wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel, {6} to understand a proverb and an enigma, the words of the wise and their riddles.

The wisdom which is contained is meant to be very practical and relevant to everyday life. This sort of wisdom is the skill to live a successful and godly life. This wisdom is contained in pithy maxims to enable the student to more easily remember lesson.

The believer must take care must be taken when reading this book. The proverbs are meant to be astute insights of life and the ways of the world, and not covenantal promises of God. Rather than defining unbreakable spiritual or divine laws, they illustrate the general outcome in various situations.

For example:

Prov 22:6. Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.

This proverb illustrates how morals, patterns and disciplines in life are often set during the informative years of childhood. It contains no guarantee that teaching a child the Christian gospel will result in them being saved.

In describing the way of the world, some of the proverbs even appear to be contradictory, indicating that sometimes there are no-win situations.

Prov 26:4-6. Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. {5} Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

This verse warns us that it is a dangerous thing to attempt to correct a fool, and care is needed. At times the wise course of action is not to answer the fool at all. At other times an answer or reproof is required, so that the fool does not conclude by your silence that he is right. When addressing a fool we must be careful not to allow him to bring us down to his level: don't lose your temper, don't speak unadvisedly and do not be rude.

### 1.2. AUTHORSHIP

The main contributing writer to the Book of Proverbs is king Solomon, and this is clearly indicated within the text:

Prov 1:1. The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:

Prov 10:1. The Proverbs of Solomon: ...

Prov 25:1. These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied:

King Solomon wrote three books of the Old Testament, only Moses contributed a greater number. Commentators suggest that Solomon wrote Song of Songs in his passionate youth; he

wrote the book of proverbs in midlife when he was at the height of his power and strength; finally he wrote Ecclesiastes in old age when no longer so self-assured and perhaps even cynical.

Not all the contents of this book belong to Solomon, some were written by other writers and some of Solomon's were added after his death. Elsewhere in Scripture we are told that Solomon wrote far more songs and proverbs than recorded in the Bible.

1 Ki 4:30-33. Thus Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt. {31} For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the surrounding nations. {32} He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five. {33} Also he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree of Lebanon even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall; he spoke also of animals, of birds, of creeping things, and of fish.

Two other authors who receive accreditation within the Book of Proverbs are Agur and king Lemuel, about whom nothing else is known.

Prov 30:1. The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, his utterance. This man declared to Ithiel; to Ithiel and Ucal:

Prov 31:1. The words of King Lemuel, the utterance which his mother taught him:

It is known that Lemuel was not a king of Israel or Judah, and therefore we conclude that he was a foreign king. It is interesting that the compilers of the book, and we would also say the Holy Spirit, accepted that the covenant people of God could learn some wisdom from those outside normally considered as unbelievers or heathen. We can learn from this because at times the people of God can be conceited and look down upon unbelievers, as though only believers could be wise or knowledgeable. And yet ungodly philosophies and false religions can contain *some* wise insights into human life and the ways of the world. For example worldly management and administration skills can be a great asset to church leaders.

The difference between the wisdom contained with this compilation of other collections of ancient or modern proverbs, is that this book clearly ascribes the source of all true wisdom is God, and that

Prov 1:7. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge...

As we have seen in Prov 25:1 king Hezekiah had men compile proverbs from various sources. It may be that what we know as the Book of Proverbs was the result of their work.

Solomon is a man famed for being wise. For Solomon wisdom was a gift given to him from God, so that he might rule over the people of Israel well.

2 Chr 1:9-12. "Now, O LORD God, let Your promise to David my father be established, for You have made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude. {10} "Now give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can judge this great people of Yours?" {11} And God said to Solomon: "Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked riches or wealth or honour or the life of your enemies, nor have you asked long life; but have asked wisdom and knowledge for yourself, that you may judge My people over whom I have made you king; {12} "wisdom and knowledge are granted to you; and I will give you riches and wealth and honour, such as none of the kings have had who were before you, nor shall any after you have the like."

The nation of Israel was geographically largest, politically strongest and militarily most secure when they were being led by wise king Solomon.

Despite his great wisdom and his many admonitions concerning sexual morality, Solomon allowed himself to be led astray.

1 Ki 11:1-6. But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites; {2} from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, "You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love. {3} And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. {4} For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David. {5} For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. {6} Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as did his father David.

It was a sad disappointing end to a life that started so well and was so greatly blessed. In the beginning Solomon set his heart to seek God and to build His temple. As a result God appeared to Solomon twice. But wisdom was not enough to keep Solomon on track. Perhaps he became so powerful that no body dare contradict or reprove him. His father David had loyal Nathan to correct him.

In later life it appears he became resentful, cynical and unsatisfied. He had achieved so many dreams and fulfilled so many projects. Yet all he could conclude was "its all vanity", "everything is meaningless". He had lost his passion for the Almighty and had lost view of eternal things.

In order to pay for his and his court's extravagance life style, Solomon taxed heavily the nation of Israel. This caused resentment amongst the people, especially the tribes other than Judah – since Judah was exempt from the tax. The seeds of rebellion were being sown.

### 1.3. POETRY

The majority of this book appears to be a randomly organised collection of maxims. Occasionally there are a few sentences placed together on a certain theme, but other statements on that theme are dispersed through the book. The sections at the beginning and at the end of the book do develop themes.

Like the poetry of many cultures Hebrew poetry uses vivid imagery, the sound of words and concise language for effect. Hebrew poetry also uses a literal technique referred to as parallelism., which is the repetition of related thoughts. Proverbs utilises different modes of parallelism.

- Synonymous Parallelism

This is where the second line of the maxim repeats the first, but using slightly different terms. The repetition serves to emphasis the point. For example:

Prov 22:1. A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favour rather than silver and gold.

- Antithetical Parallelism

This is where the second line of the maxim emphasises and explains the thought of the first, but by stating the negative. For example:

Prov 22:3.        A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished.

Throughout Proverbs powerful and vivid contrasts are often used within a maxim. Antithesis being used to clarify the meaning of the key thought. Among the ideas set in contrast are:

- Wisdom versus Folly
- Righteousness versus Wickedness
- Good versus Evil
- Life versus Death
- Prosperity versus Poverty
- Honour versus Dishonour
- Permanence versus Transience
- Truth versus Falsehood
- Industry versus Laziness
- Friend versus Enemy
- Prudence versus Rashness
- Fidelity versus Adultery
- Peace versus Violence
- Goodwill versus Anger
- God versus Man
- Climactic Parallelism

This is where the second line of the proverb completes the thought of the first.

Prov 22:2.        The rich and the poor have this in common, the LORD is the maker of them all.

- “Better Than”

Also there are many proverbs which compare between two states, stating that one is better than the other.

Prov 16:8.        Better is a little with righteousness, than vast revenues without justice.

## 2. WISDOM

Wisdom is the ability in life's various circumstances to:

- perceive,
- discern or judge correctly
- and to follow the best course of action.

It is the ability that gives the owner an insight into the “big picture”; the perception of more than that which is obvious, and the ability to balance various arguments and consequences.

People can have wisdom on a variety of levels. Common sense, being streetwise and having savvy are all types of wisdom. Then there is the wisdom that an artist or craftsman demonstrates.

Ex 36:1-2. "And Bezalel and Aholiab, and every gifted artisan in whom the LORD has put wisdom and understanding, to know how to do all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, shall do according to all that the LORD has commanded." {2} Then Moses called Bezalel and Aholiab, and every gifted artisan in whose heart the LORD had put wisdom, everyone whose heart was stirred, to come and do the work.

Some people can have wisdom in dealing with other people, using people skills and insight into other's feelings. Some people have the ability of organisation. They can manage people, structures, systems and time. A good leader is not noted by their ability to do, but their ability to lead – to steer a course with wisdom.

Wisdom can be learned by listening to those with more experience and wisdom. Experience can teach us wisdom, if we have ears to hear. We all should be growing in wisdom through life. The skill of hearing the voice of wisdom is developed from childhood.

Prov 1:8-9. My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother; {9} For they will be a graceful ornament on your head, and chains about your neck.

All of the types of wisdom mentioned above can be demonstrated by unbelievers as well as believers. But over and above all these examples of wisdom, there is spiritual wisdom. This is the ability to steer one's life in a moral and godly way – a way that pleases the Almighty and attracts His blessing. This sort of wisdom reaps eternal spiritual benefits as well as temporal ones. Biblical wisdom starts with recognising God's sovereignty and valuing things as God does.

Prov 1:7. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Mat 7:24. "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock:

True wisdom is therefore the skill to build a godly life.

Wisdom and righteousness go together. It is good to be wise, and it is wise to be good.

Some people possess knowledge of evil devices and skills to instigate wicked schemes. This may be called wisdom in some circles, but because the ultimate end is destruction, the believer should recognise these as folly. James describes the quality of godly wisdom and compares that with the wisdom that is from below.

James 3:15-17. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. {16} For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. {17} But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

At times the Book of Proverbs uses an anthropomorphism concerning wisdom and describes it in the feminine gender. Perhaps this is because like a good wife, she is to be wooed, cherished, embraced and highly valued.

Prov 1:20-21. Wisdom calls aloud outside; she raises her voice in the open squares. {21} She cries out in the chief concourses, at the openings of the gates in the city She speaks her words:

- Prov 3:15. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her.
- Prov 3:18. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who retain her.
- Prov 4:6. Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; love her, and she will keep you.
- Prov 4:8-9. Exalt her, and she will promote you; she will bring you honour, when you embrace her. {9} She will place on your head an ornament of grace; a crown of glory she will deliver to you."

For some people the art of life eludes them. They consistently make mistakes and poor decisions which prevent their lives from progressing or improving. They make bad choices. They make unwise moves and changes. They make poor use of their money and time. They say the wrong things. They have no sense of occasion. They fail to recognise a window of opportunity. They have no sense of timing. Through impatience they fail to wait upon God and his timing. Such people need to learn wisdom.

### 2.1. INSTRUCTIONS TO THE YOUNG

- Prov 1:8-9. My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother; {9} For they will be a graceful ornament on your head, and chains about your neck.

Much of Proverbs is the instruction of concerned parents to their children, particularly a father to his son. This reflects the Hebrew mentorship culture displayed in family life where a son (chosen or eldest) was expected to inherit the leadership of the family. The family's head had the responsibility for the preparation of his successor.

These youths are warned about many of the traps that commonly ensnare young men:

- sexual temptation (Prov 5:15–20, Prov 7:1–27);
- foolishness (Prov 12:15–16);
- ill-gotten gain (Prov 10:2, Prov 13:11);
- verbal abuse (Prov 13:2–3, Prov 15:1);
- strong drink (Prov 31:4);
- pride or selfish ambition (Prov 16:1–9).

### 2.2. THE IMPORTANCE OF WISDOM

Proverbs declares the importance of wisdom, calling it the principle thing.

- Prov 4:5-9. Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. {6} Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; love her, and she will keep you. {7} Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding. {8} Exalt her, and she will promote you; she will bring you honour, when you embrace her. {9} She will place on your head an ornament of grace; a crown of glory she will deliver to you."

The New Testament emphasises the importance of love.

Mat 22:37-40. Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." {38} This is the first and great commandment. {39} And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' {40} "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

1 Cor 13:13. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Some people might think that spirituality is the primary thing – concentrating on prayer and knowing God.

Life is not just about one thing that we specialise in or do well. To build a successful life we need to embrace a number of fundamental things, such as love, spirituality and wisdom.

### 2.3. TO BE DESIRED

Prov 2:1-5. My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, {2} So that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; {3} Yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, {4} If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; {5} Then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.

Prov 3:13-15. Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding; {14} For her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. {15} She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her.

Wisdom is available to everybody, but it comes at a high price. It is to be desired and to be sought after. The fruit of applied wisdom is said to be riches, honour and long life. She is to be considered as precious as rubies and as valuable as silver. Silver has to be dug out of the ground and then extracted from the ore using several refining processes. It takes effort, energy and time. People are only willing to expend such expense for metals and gems that are very costly, which will yield a good profit.

The wisdom that God gives does not come easy or quickly. It has to be consistently sought after. Seeking wisdom is a long term investment. The dividends received early on may seem small and disproportionate for the effort required. But as we grow in the wisdom of life, as we start to apply numerous skills, then we find that the benefits multiply and like the effect of compounded interest, we are enriched.

### 2.4. WISDOM – A GIFT FROM GOD

Wisdom is described as belonging to God from the beginning and being eternal.

Prov 8:22-31. "The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old. {23} I have been established from everlasting, from the beginning, before there was ever an earth. {24} When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no fountains abounding with water. {25} Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I was brought forth; {26} While as yet He had not made the earth or the fields, or the primeval dust of the world. {27} When He prepared the heavens, I was there, when He drew a circle on the face of the deep, {28} When He established the clouds above, when He strengthened the fountains of the deep, {29} when He assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters would not transgress His command, when He marked out the foundations of the earth, {30} Then I was beside Him as a master craftsman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him, {31} Rejoicing in His inhabited world, and my delight was with the sons of men.

Wisdom is a gift that God gives. But before He gives the larger and rarer gems, he looks to see if there is anyone who has an earnest desire, who has set their heart to seek after it, who appreciates its value. Many people are unwilling to go through the disciplines required to chase after wisdom. The effort may appear to outweigh the benefits.

Prov 2:6-8. For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; {7} He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk uprightly; {8} He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints.

1 Cor 2:13. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

1 Cor 12:8. for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit,

Eph 1:17. that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,

### **2.5. HOW DO WE CHASE AFTER WISDOM?**

#### **2.5.1. Studying the Word of God.**

Rom 12:2. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

2 Tim 3:16-17. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, {17} that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

#### **2.5.2. Praying for it.**

James 1:5-6. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. {6} But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

Eph 1:15-17. Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, {16} do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: {17} that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,

### 2.5.3. Submitting to God's correction.

Prov 3:11-12. My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction; {12} For whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights.

Prov 6:23. For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life,

We have to give attention to the things that God is saying or has said to us.

### 2.5.4. By being mentored by wiser, more experienced people.

Phil 2:22. But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel.

This is best through a direct relationship but it can also be done through reading the books and biographies of godly people.

### 2.5.5. Learning by observation

God created the universe through wisdom. It is little wonder then that we can learn wisdom by observing creation. Even simple animals have been given some wisdom, and we can learn from them.

Prov 30:24-28. There are four things which are little on the earth, but they are exceedingly wise: {25} The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their food in the summer; {26} The rock badgers are a feeble folk, yet they make their homes in the crags; {27} The locusts have no king, yet they all advance in ranks; {28} The spider skilfully grasps with its hands, and it is in kings' palaces.

Ants know the wisdom of planning a head. They store up food in the summer to keep them through the winter months. Elsewhere ants are similarly commended for their work ethic, which does not require a foreman to be watching.

Prov 6:6-8. Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, {7} which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, {8} provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest.

Badges show wisdom in making defences against danger by living in rocky crags. The locusts know the wisdom of synergy – working together towards a common goal. The spider knows the wisdom of using the skills within its hands with persistence to weave a home.

## 2.6. WISDOM DOES NOT BELONG TO ONE PERSON

When we seek God for wisdom in a given situation, one of the ways he can answer is to send along a wise counsellor. Just as the spiritual gifts are invested in the various members of the body of Christ, rather than one person, so the mind of Christ is revealed to the body.

Prov 12:15. The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise.

Even king Solomon knew the security and power in wise counsel.

Prov 11:14. Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.

1 Cor 13:9. For we know in part and we prophesy in part.

1 Cor 2:16. For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

### 3. THE FOOL

The Book of Proverbs describes how there many people who pursue life in foolish ways. These are shallow, they are easily enticed, they are governed by pleasure and convenience rather than by principle and they are self confidence. Scripture plainly places the responsibility for the condition of the fool upon their own shoulders.

Vines Expository Dictionary states:

*℣* ♦ ✕ ● ☒ "fool." This word appears primarily in the wisdom literature. A person described by *℣* ♦ ✕ ● ☒ generally lacks wisdom; indeed, wisdom is beyond his grasp (Prov. 24:7). In another nuance, "fool" is a morally undesirable individual who despises wisdom and discipline (Prov. 1:7; 15:5). He mocks guilt (Prov. 14:9), and is quarrelsome (Prov. 20:3) and licentious (Prov. 7:22). Trying to give him instruction is futile (Prov. 16:22).

#### 3.1. ULTIMATE FOOLISHNESS

Psa 14:1. The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good.

As we have seen the fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom. So the ultimate expression of folly is denying that there is a God. A person could be knowledgeable, educated, successful and wise in this world, but commit the ultimate folly and be lost for eternity. On what do they put their confidence when they boldly state they have no creator or judge? Simply upon their own feelings, their own shallow, un-researched thoughts and their own prejudices.

#### 3.2. TRUTHS ABOUT FOOLS

Prov 26:1-12. As snow in summer and rain in harvest, so honour is not fitting for a fool. {2} Like a flitting sparrow, like a flying swallow, so a curse without cause shall not alight. {3} A whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the fool's back. {4} Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. {5} Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes. {6} He who sends a message by the hand of a fool cuts off his own feet and drinks violence. {7} Like the legs of the lame that hang limp is a proverb in the mouth of fools. {8} Like one who binds a stone in a sling is he who gives honour to a fool. {9} Like a thorn that goes into the hand of a drunkard is a proverb in the mouth of fools. {10} The great God who formed everything gives the fool his hire and the transgressor his wages. {11} As a dog returns to his own vomit, so a fool repeats his folly. {12} Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

These verses gives us a series of truths concerning fools:

- Honour is not fitting for a fool (verse 1). In fact giving honour to a fool is risky and can have dangerous consequences (verse 8).
- Fools go through life suffering harsh treatment, punishment, and loss of freedom, like a beast of burden (verse 3).
- Fools cannot listen to reason (verse 4).
- They are convinced they are right, and have to be shown the error of their ways (verse 5).
- You cannot win with a fool (verses 4 and 5)
- They are unreliable and irresponsible (verse 6).
- Knowledge of wisdom has no impact upon a fool (verses 7 & 9).
- As sin earns wages (death) so the fool will reap according to his folly (10).
- The fool is addicted to his folly.

### 3.3. THE TYPES OF FOOLS

We have seen the benefits of wisdom, how she can bring riches, honour and longevity to the one who embraces and lives by her. But the cries of wisdom are not heeded by many people. In particular there are three types of people who refuse to hear her call: simple ones, scorers, and fools.

Prov 1:22. "How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? For scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge.

#### 3.3.1. The Simple

The simple are shallow, naïve and impressionable people who are open to all kinds of influences, both good and bad. They lack moral discernment being unable to tell the difference between truth and falsehood and failing to consider the consequence. Living for pleasure or convenience they lack direction and are headed for a fall.

- The simple's turning away from wisdom will slay him.

Prov 1:32. For the turning away of the simple will slay them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them;

- The simple are easily ensnared and caught in traps.

Prov 7:7. And saw among the simple, I perceived among the youths, a young man devoid of understanding,

- He is gullible.

Prov 14:15. The simple believes every word, but the prudent considers well his steps.

- Is a day dreamer

Prov 17:24. Wisdom is in the sight of him who has understanding, but the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth.

- He drifts through life taking no responsibility.

Prov 22:3. A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished.

- His actions will mean that his life will achieve nothing.

Prov 14:18. The simple inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.

### 3.3.2. Scorners or Scoffers

Scorners or scoffers are those who treat wise counsel with contempt, which they express through their comments, gestures or facial expressions. They treat godliness and wisdom with contempt; nothing is sacred or serious to them. They treat those in authority with contempt, and attempt to belittle those who successful or famous. The source of a man's scornful nature is pride. They laugh at wisdom and toy with wickedness. Warned of the consequences of pursuing evil, the scoffer says, "It won't happen to me."

- The scorner delights in his scorning, thinking it makes him look big.

Prov 1:22. "How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? For scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge.

- As with all proud people, the scornful will reap what they sow.

Prov 3:33-34. The curse of the LORD is on the house of the wicked, but He blesses the home of the just. {34} Surely He scorns the scornful, but gives grace to the humble.

- The scoffer shames and hates those who try to correct him.

Prov 9:7-8. "He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself, and he who rebukes a wicked man only harms himself. {8} Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you.

- The scoffer refuses to listen to a rebuke.

Prov 13:1. A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke. But rebukes and correction are the way of life.

Prov 6:23. For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life,

Prov 10:17. He who keeps instruction is in the way of life, but he who refuses correction goes astray.

- The scoffer vainly searches for wisdom. The God who he does not believe exists, hides it from him.

Prov 14:6. A scoffer seeks wisdom and does not find it, but knowledge is easy to him who understands.

- Scoffers will inevitably face judgment.

Prov 19:29. Judgments are prepared for scoffers, and beatings for the backs of fools.

- The scoffer is full of arrogant pride.

Prov 21:24. A proud and haughty man; "Scoffer" is his name; he acts with arrogant pride.

- The scoffer is a catalyst for trouble in any group of people.

Prov 22:10. Cast out the scoffer, and contention will leave; yes, strife and reproach will cease.

- The Scoffer is detested by others.

Prov 24:9. The devising of foolishness is sin, and the scoffer is an abomination to men.

### 3.3.3. The Arrogant Fool

**Fools** are those who senselessly refuse instruction; they are conceited and opinionated in their ignorance.<sup>1</sup>

This person wilfully ignores wisdom and lives for himself. He has no interest in whether something is good or bad. All that matters is, "What's in it for me?"

- Hates knowledge.

Prov 1:22 "How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? For scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge.

- Is quarrelsome

Prov 20:3. It is honourable for a man to stop striving, since any fool can start a quarrel.

- Makes a sport out of doing evil.

Prov 10:23. To do evil is like sport to a fool, but a man of understanding has wisdom.

- Proclaims foolishness to others.

Prov 12:23. A prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of fools proclaims foolishness.

Prov 13:16. Every prudent man acts with knowledge, but a fool lays open his folly.

- Is wise in his own eyes and self-confident.

Prov 12:15. The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise.

Prov 14:16. A wise man fears and departs from evil, but a fool rages and is self-confident.

Prov 28:26. He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but whoever walks wisely will be delivered.

- Likes to give his opinion rather than learn.

Prov 18:2. A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart.

- Despises authority and the wisdom of the wise.

Prov 23:9. Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of your words.

- Despises his parents.

Prov 15:5. A fool despises his father's instruction, but he who receives correction is prudent.

Prov 15:20. A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish man despises his mother.

- Is quick to speak out

Prov 29:11. A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back.

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<sup>1</sup>William MacDonald; edited with introductions by Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible commentary: Old and New Testaments [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1995 by William MacDonald.

Prov 29:20. Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

- Is not teachable

Prov 29:9. If a wise man contends with a foolish man, whether the fool rages or laughs, there is no peace.

- Is more dangerous than an angry bear.

Prov 17:12. Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs, rather than a fool in his folly.

- Will be destroyed through his complacency.

Prov 1:32. For the turning away of the simple will slay them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them;

Prov 10:8. The wise in heart will receive commands, but a prating fool will fall.

- Is destined for a beating.

Prov 19:29. Judgments are prepared for scoffers, and beatings for the backs of fools.

Prov 26:3. A whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the fool's back.

- Will dissipate his wealth and come to nothing

Prov 11:29. He who troubles his own house will inherit the wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise of heart.

### 3.4. THE FOOL WITHIN

It is easy to study the destructive life style of some ancient Biblical character described as being a "Fool". The difficulty with life is that people, ourselves included, are not 100 % wise, or 100 % foolish. We all tend to be a mixture of the two.

So what characteristics of the various types of fool can we use to recognise the fool within, in order to move towards being wholly wise, and there by improving our life-fruit?

- Are we convinced that we are right, and see no areas for improvement?
- Are we defensive, easily hurt and immovable when challenged by others?
- Are we morally discerning?
- Are we committed to the rigors of being a disciple of Christ, or are we lazy in Bible Study, prayer, church attendance and service?
- Are we opinionated?
- Do we control our tongue?
- Do we except and appreciate correction?
- Do we take responsibility for our own lives and in the community around us (family, church etc)?
- Do we consider in sport to rail those in authority?
- Do we stir up strife amongst people?

#### 4. WHAT WE SAY

Prov 10:18-21. Whoever hides hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool. {19} In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise. {20} The tongue of the righteous is choice silver; the heart of the wicked is worth little. {21} The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of wisdom.

##### 4.1. THE POWER OF WORDS

Prov 18:20-21. A man's stomach shall be satisfied from the fruit of his mouth, from the produce of his lips he shall be filled. {21} Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

Words have a spiritual dimension, they are an expression of the inner person. Words carry a power and authority. Genesis tells us that God created the world by solely by speaking. Everything began with a word, and John reveals that word was the Son of God, who himself is without beginning or end.

John 1:1-3. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. {2} He was in the beginning with God. {3} All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

The Centurion recognised the authority of Jesus' word.

Mat 8:8-9. The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. {9} For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

Jesus said:

John 6:63. "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."

Our words are also important. We are going to be judged by our words, not our intentions.

Mat 12:36-37. "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. {37} For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Psa 139:4 For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.

Paul writes on the importance of speaking our confession.

Rom 10:9-10. ... if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. {10} For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

At times we are tempted to keep quiet about our faith on Christ Jesus, especially if Christians are being ridiculed by those around us. But Jesus warned us

Mat 10:32-33. "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. {33} "But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

To the church at Ephesus Paul wrote:

Eph 4:29-31. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. {30} And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. {31} Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

Corrupt communication is as unbecoming a Christian as is stealing; both grieve the Holy Spirit.

The Book of Proverbs teaches a lot about the power of the tongue, how it can be harnessed for good and how it can be destructive.

Prov 15:4. A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.

Prov 12:18. There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health.

Prov 25:15. By long forbearance a ruler is persuaded, and a gentle tongue breaks a bone.

If we are going to live a life that is under the blessing of God, and if we are going to achieve our destiny, then we are going to have to take note of what the Bible tells us about the way we use our tongues.

## 4.2. CONTROLLING THE TONGUE

We are familiar with James' admonition concerning the tongue. He warns us that in like manner to a spark in a dry forest, the tongue can produce massive destruction.<sup>2</sup>

James 1:26. If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.

James 3:2. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

An uncontrolled tongue is an indication that a person's religion is an empty shame, and that the person is deceived if they think they are righteous before God. In fact the way we talk is a measure of our spiritual maturity.

Self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, and one aspect of our lives which must be controlled is our speech. We must be able to control what we say, how we say it and when we say it. We can all talk, but not everybody can communicate effectively, especially in conflict conditions.

Some Proverbs on the issue include:

Prov 10:19. In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise.

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<sup>2</sup> James 3:5-8 Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! {6} And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. {7} For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. {8} But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

- Prov 11:12. He who is devoid of wisdom despises his neighbour, but a man of understanding holds his peace.
- Prov 13:3. He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction.
- Prov 17:28. Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; when he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive.
- Prov 18:13. He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him.
- Prov 21:23. Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles.

### 4.3. HEALTHY TONGUE

Speaking what is right, and saying it in a right way, is a healthy and attractive life style, that will earn people's respect. Not only the benefits for controlling our speech spiritual, in the sense of attracting God's blessing, but it also pays dividends among the people around us.

How good it is to be known as a person who:

- Is always honest
- Never talks about people behind their back
- We never divulge secrets
- Is kind in what they say.

In our work places we are often tempted to join in with other people in speaking ill, and we may not be popular when we make a stand for righteousness. But when people know that they can safely confide in us, then we will draw people to ourselves.

- Prov 12:19. The truthful lip shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment.
- Prov 15:4. A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.
- Prov 16:21. The wise in heart will be called prudent, and sweetness of the lips increases learning.
- Prov 17:9. He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends.
- Prov 21:23. Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles.

Righteous speaking can also bring promotion to us:

- Prov 16:13. Righteous lips are the delight of kings, and they love him who speaks what is right.
- Prov 22:11. He who loves purity of heart and has grace on his lips, the king will be his friend.

### 4.4. UNHEALTHY TONGUE

There are many warnings against evil speech in Proverbs. The most famous of which is probably:

Prov 6:16-19. These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: {17} A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, {18} A heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, {19} A false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren.

Ungodly people enjoy ungodly talk.

Prov 16:27. An ungodly man digs up evil, and it is on his lips like a burning fire.

Prov 17:4. An evildoer gives heed to false lips; a liar listens eagerly to a spiteful tongue.

Those who sow wicked words will reap from their folly.

Prov 17:20. He who has a deceitful heart finds no good, and he who has a perverse tongue falls into evil.

Prov 21:6. Getting treasures by a lying tongue is the fleeting fantasy of those who seek death.

Prov 25:23. The north wind brings forth rain, and a backbiting tongue an angry countenance.

There is a saying in the world that “Talk is Cheap”, perhaps this is because there is so much of it. It is easy to express an opinion or to make a comment on any subject. We can all be experts when we don’t have to do the job.

Proverbs warns that:

Prov 18:2. A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart.

If we want to avoid a fool’s reward then we need to learn to listen more than speak, and to only share what experience and learning qualifies us to say.

#### 4.5. LIAR

Jesus warned us that the Devil is the father of all lies<sup>3</sup>. The Book of Revelation draws our attention to the fate of liars:

Rev 22:15. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.

We are all tempted to use a lie to hide our shame, to escape trouble or to achieve our desires. But the truth is that a lie is a spiritual event, full of the seed of Satan. The harvest that is reaped is destructive and costly.

Prov 4:24. Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you.

Prov 12:22. Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal truthfully are His delight.

Prov 26:28. A lying tongue hates those who are crushed by it, and a flattering mouth works ruin.

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<sup>3</sup> John 8:44 "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.

## 4.6. TALEBEARER

It might surprise some people to hear that the word of God says an awful lot about the prohibition of gossiping among God's people. Gossip is saying behind someone's back what you would not say to their face. Consider some of the following verses.

- Lev 19:16        'You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbour: I am the LORD.
- Psa 15:1-3        LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?  
{2} He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart; {3} He who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbour, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend;
- Prov 11:13.        A talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter.
- Prov 18:8.        The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body.
- Prov 20:19.        He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips.
- Prov 26:20.        Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases.
- Prov 26:22.        The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body.

## 4.7. FLATTERY

Proverbs warns us to avoid the Flatterer. Flattery is saying to somebody face what you would not say behind their back. People use this form of falsehood to get along side somebody for some hidden and devious end.

There are a number of Proverbs that warns about the immoral woman and the adulterous. One of the means in which she ensnares her victims is through flattery.

- Prov 7:21.        With her enticing speech she caused him to yield, with her flattering lips she seduced him.

Avoid the flatterer because they are setting a trap.

- Prov 20:19.        He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips.
- Prov 26:28.        A lying tongue hates those who are crushed by it, and a flattering mouth works ruin.
- Prov 28:23.        He who rebukes a man will find more favour afterward than he who flatters with the tongue.
- Prov 29:5.        A man who flatters his neighbour spreads a net for his feet.

## 4.8. CONCLUSIONS

Jesus' teaching shows us that if we are going to change what we say, and how we say it, then we need firstly to change the contents of our heart.

Luke 6:45      “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”

As the believer grows in Christ-likeness then the use of their tongue is one aspect of their life which should improve.

The Book of Proverbs offers some principles to help us evaluate the worth of our words:

- Own the truth at all cost.
- Understand the power of positive and negative words.
- Sometimes the wisest course is to keep quiet.
- We need to weigh our thoughts and words before we speak.
- Never break a confidence.
- Let what we say behind a person’s back always be the same as what we say to their face.
- If we know how to use words, we can accomplish noble ends.
- We need to watch what we say. Our mouth can get us in deep trouble.

### 5. PRIDE AND THE PROUD

Prov 21:4.      A haughty look, a proud heart, and the ploughing of the wicked are sin.

The book of proverbs, like the rest of Scripture has a lot to say on the issue of pride and couples it with arrogance, evil behaviour and perverse speech.

Jesus says that pride is one of the inner vices that defile a man.

Mark 7:20-23.      And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. {21} "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, {22} "thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. {23} "All these evil things come from within and defile a man."

Scripture emphasises the particular way God obstructs the proud. There are few things noted for making God react so immediately and so vigorous in a person’s life, than the presence of pride.

Normally when referring to its presence within the human heart, pride is seen as a negative, sinful and destructive force. There are uses of within Scripture that have a positive sense.

#### 5.1. A POSITIVE PRIDE

The Hebrew verb *ga'ah* (גָּאָה, 1342)<sup>4</sup> means “to be proud, be exalted” and is used seven times in biblical Hebrew and is used in a positive sense to refer to the majesty of God, in the sense of “to be exalted”.

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<sup>4</sup>Vine, W. E., Unger, M. F., & White, W. (1996). *Vine's complete expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words*. Nashville: T. Nelson.

Exo 15:1. Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and spoke, saying: "I will sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!

Exo 15:1 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: "I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly the noun *ga'on*<sup>6</sup> (גִּבְוָהַ, 1347) which means "pride" signifies God's excellence or majesty. The meaning of *ga'on* is here close to that of *kabod*, "glory." The word *ga'on* is also used with reference to nature as something mighty, luxuriant, rich, and spectacular.

Jer 12:5. "If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, in which you trusted, they wearied you, then how will you do in the floodplain [or swelling, literally "majesty"] of the Jordan?

## 5.2. NEGATIVE PRIDE

The majority of the uses of *ga'on* are negative in that they denote human pride the opposite of humility.

Amos 6:8. The Lord GOD has sworn by Himself, the LORD God of hosts says: "I abhor the pride of Jacob, and hate his palaces; therefore I will deliver up the city and all that is in it."

In the King James version of the same verse *ga'on* is translated as excellency.

Amos 6:8 The Lord GOD hath sworn by himself, saith the LORD the God of hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein.<sup>7</sup>

In the New Testament *huperephania*<sup>8</sup> is used to mean haughtiness, arrogance, ostentatious pride bordering on insolence, and a disdainful attitude toward others. It is characterized by superiority of attitude as displayed by the Pharisees.

Luke 18:9-11. Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: {10} "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. {11} "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men; extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.

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<sup>5</sup>*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (Ex 15:1). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

<sup>6</sup> Vine, W. E., Unger, M. F., & White, W. (1996). *Vine's complete expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words*. Nashville: T. Nelson.

<sup>7</sup>*The Holy Bible : King James Version*. 1995 (Am 6:8). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>8</sup>Hayford, J. W., & Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). *Hayford's Bible handbook*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

John 7:47-49. Then the Pharisees answered them, "Are you also deceived? {48} "Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? {49} "But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed."

The word is a combination of *huper*, "over," and *phainomai*, "to appear." It is a state of pride that is the very opposite of Jesus' claim for Himself, meek (*praotes*) and lowly (*tapeinos*).

### 5.3. THE PERIL OF PRIDE

Pride is an attitude which can be devastating. Pride can be thought of as satisfaction and security in **self**. The proud looks at himself and his achievements and believes that they are praiseworthy and notable. We are proud of our strengths, our achievements and our abilities. We are secure in our own person, in who we are. We do not see our poverty of being, and our need of change.

Pride is the worship of self, elevating self to the throne, and stands in rebellion against the creator.

Psa 10:2-4. The wicked in his pride persecutes the poor; let them be caught in the plots which they have devised. {3} For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire; he blesses the greedy and renounces the LORD. {4} The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; god is in none of his thoughts.

Luke 1:49-53 For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. {50} And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation. {51} He has shown strength with His arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. {52} He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. {53} He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.

Pride is indeed an imagination of our hearts, for it is a lie, a self-deception. The Scriptures tell us how poverty stricken we all are, how that there is no good in our flesh. Everything we have we have received, and everything us know we have learned.<sup>9</sup>

Looking through God's word we find the following affects of pride.

#### 5.3.1. God Hates Pride

Prov 6:16-17. These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: {17} A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood,

Prov 8:13. The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.

#### 5.3.2. Pride Brings a Fall

Pride is an attitude that undermines the very foundation of everything we seek to build. Pride trips us up in the way we take, so that we come crashing down.

Prov 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Prov 29:23 A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honour.

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Cor 4:7 For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

It was pride that caused the Devil to fall, totally corrupting his nature.<sup>10</sup> There have also been some noteworthy men within Scripture who's lives have been marred by pride:

2 Chr 26:16. But when he [Uzziah] was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction, for he transgressed against the LORD his God by entering the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.

2 Chr 32:24-26. In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death, and he prayed to the LORD; and He spoke to him and gave him a sign. {25} But Hezekiah did not repay according to the favour shown him, for his heart was lifted up; therefore wrath was looming over him and over Judah and Jerusalem. {26} Then Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah.

There are also those characters within Scripture who epitomize the folly of pride.

One example is Haman. Haman was a high ranking and ambitious official in the Persian Court. Mordecai the Jew saw through Haman's egotistic image, and refused to bow in homage before him. The insulted Haman determine to take vengeance, not only upon Mordecai but also upon every Jewish person in kingdom. He savoured the thought of revenge as he formulated his scheme, not realising that it would come back on his own head. Finally he is hung on the very gallows he build for Mordecai, and the Jewish people were all saved.

Another example of a proud filled life is that of Shebna<sup>11</sup> who was a high government official under King Hezekiah of Judah. He was among the leaders who went to meet with the Assyrian Rabshakeh when he came against Jerusalem (Is. 36:2-3). Isaiah predicted that God would pull this man down because of an extravagant tomb that he had built for himself.

In a time when all of God's people should have been on their knees seeking God's mercy and deliverance, this proud leader was building himself a grand monument. Therefore, god assured him that he would never use the elaborately carved tomb, but would die in a foreign country.<sup>12</sup>

### 5.3.3. Pride Causes Division and Strife

Prov 13:10. By pride comes nothing but strife, but with the well-advised is wisdom.

Prov 28:25. He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife, but he who trusts in the LORD will be prospered.

Arrogant pride makes us defensive in a conflict situation, and causes us to focus upon our reputation, our feelings and our will to be vindicated rather than focusing on cause of Christ – his

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<sup>10</sup> See Isa 14:12-15 and Ezek 28:15-17.

<sup>11</sup> Isa 22:15-21 Thus says the Lord GOD of hosts: "Go, proceed to this steward, To Shebna, who is over the house, and say: {16} 'What have you here, and whom have you here, That you have hewn a sepulchre here, As he who hews himself a sepulchre on high, Who carves a tomb for himself in a rock? {17} Indeed, the LORD will throw you away violently, O mighty man, And will surely seize you. {18} He will surely turn violently and toss you like a ball Into a large country; There you shall die, and there your glorious chariots Shall be the shame of your master's house. {19} So I will drive you out of your office, And from your position he will pull you down. {20} 'Then it shall be in that day, That I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah; {21} I will clothe him with your robe And strengthen him with your belt; I will commit your responsibility into his hand. He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem And to the house of Judah.

<sup>12</sup> *What does the Bible say about--* : Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson.

church and his kingdom. We seek to win personal battles, and in that process we lose spiritual campaigns.

It is arrogant pride that prevents us from asking forgiveness or confessing our need.

Prov 21:24 A proud and haughty man; "Scoffer" is his name; he acts with arrogant pride.

#### 5.3.4. Brings a Curse and the Rebuke of God

Prov 15:25. The LORD will destroy the house of the proud, but He will establish the boundary of the widow.

Prov 16:5 Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; though they join forces, none will go unpunished.

Psa 31:23. Oh, love the LORD, all you His saints! For the LORD preserves the faithful, and fully repays the proud person.

Psa 119:21. You rebuke the proud; the cursed, who stray from Your commandments.

#### 5.3.5. Pride Brings Shame

Prov 11:2. When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom.

Prov 16:18-19. Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. {19} Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.

Prov 29:23. A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honour.

#### 5.3.6. Pride Is A Lie

Psa 119:69. The proud have forged a lie against me, but I will keep Your precepts with my whole heart.

The proud have forged a lie. The word forged suggests that the scheme was carefully planned, being repeatedly hammered into shape until it is totally convincing. The lie may be fashioned to look like the truth, but God knows. The psalmist casts himself upon the truth of God's word and ways.

Obediah 3 The pride of your heart has deceived you...

Pride is the lifting up of self, the worship of self. As such it is self-deception. The proud have believed a lie, and judge others by the standards of this falsehood.

### 5.4. THE DANGER OF FAMILIARITY

Psa 30:6-8. Now in my prosperity I said, "I shall never be moved." {7} LORD, by Your favour You have made my mountain stand strong; you hid Your face, and I was troubled. {8} I cried out to You, O LORD; and to the LORD I made supplication:

When we have been blessed, enriched and strengthened by God, we can become complacent, even haughty. We can be tempted to think that we have made it, we have arrived and that we now are secure and unmovable. We forget that we are nothing, that we too are as grass, here then gone. We need to continually recognise our spiritual poverty and remember the pit from which we were drawn.

John 15:5. "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

Self effort, will power, hard work all amount to nothing if we are not connected to the vine.

### 6. THE POWER OF HUMILITY

Humility is the antonym of pride, and as such humility is usually coupled with pride in Proverbs. The negative effects of pride are compared with the positive results of the humble.

Prov 3:34. Surely He scorns the scornful, but gives grace to the humble.

Prov 11:2. When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom.

Prov 16:19. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.

The Hebrew for humble is *shaphel* (shah-fail)<sup>13</sup> and means to make low, depress, sink, lower, debase, set in a lower place, lay low, descend, humble, abase. It is a typical Biblical reversal therefore that Proverbs describes how, in the long term, it is pride that actually brings a person low, but humility brings honour and elevation.

Prov 29:23. A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honour.

#### 6.1. FREEDOM FROM ARROGANCE

Humility is a freedom from arrogance that comes from recognising that:

- Our lives are created by God and for his purpose
- He has given us all our skills and abilities
- Everything we own is a loan from God
- Everything we achieve, everything we own, and our very lives all are temporal.

Humble people are content in God and His provision. They are also secure. They do not need to promote or protect their own image, because they know that apart from Christ they have no righteousness, value or worth. But they are also aware that in Christ everyone has great worth and importance.

The Greek philosophers despised humility because to them it implied inadequacy, lack of dignity, and worthlessness. One of the Greek words for humility, *tapeinophrosune*, literally means "lowliness of mind". In their thinking a lowly or humble person was someone like a slave, someone who was servile and grovelling. Such people were assumed to have no intelligence, in a culture where higher thinking and self-conceit were honoured. Little wonder the Greeks found no wisdom in the Christian gospel that demanded we humble our self and become like a servant. This is the demonic wisdom that is still in the world around us.

But Biblical humility means not thinking of oneself more highly than is true:

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<sup>13</sup>Hayford, J. W., & Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). *Hayford's Bible handbook*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Rom 12:3. For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

Instead it is the acknowledging of what is true about our lives; strengths and weaknesses; pluses and minuses, successes and failures. Humility has nothing to do with self-loathing, but it seeing ourselves as God sees us, and is essential if we are to truly walk with God.

Micah 6:8. He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?

## 6.2. FREEDOM TO SERVE

It takes humility not to be intimidated by other people when they are more intelligent, more gifted or just better than we are. It takes humility to rejoice when others receive the things we want or achieve the things we desired.

It takes humility to put other people and their interests before our own, but that is what we are called to do in Scripture.

Rom 12:10. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another;

John 13:12-17. So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? {13} "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. {14} "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. {15} "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. {16} "Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. {17} "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

## 6.3. THE FRUIT OF LOVE

1 Cor 13:4-7. Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; {5} does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; {6} does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; {7} bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

*Love does not envy:* Envy comes from self-centredness, and compares with others. Love releases others and is pleased when they receive and possess. Love has a contentment within itself which frees from self-seeking. Love is non possessive, it does not want, what it does not have.

*Love does not parade itself:* Love is non-competitive, its does not seek to promote itself, it does not look out for itself. Love rests in contentment. Love does not have to have its say, doesn't need to be seen as knowledgeable. Love is unthreatened when others parade themselves.

*Love is not puffed up:* Arrogance and pride mean that a person is deceived concerning themselves. Being at rest and filled with contentment, love is never full of self, but neither is love insecure and timid.

Humility is the quite confidence that a heart possesses when it is filled with the love of God.

#### 6.4. EXAMPLES OF HUMBLE MEN

Two of the biblical characters noted for their humility were Moses and Jesus. Both acted as mediators between God and His people. Both established a covenant with promises.

When we look at the lives of these men we see that neither of them were weak, but instead they were strong leaders who exercised genuine authority.

Num 12:3. Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.

Phil 2:3-9. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. {4} Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. {5} Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, {6} who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, {7} but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. {8} And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. {9} Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

Spiritual immaturity is being wrapped up in ourselves; our ministry, our life, our accomplishments are not what is important. Let's not take ourselves too seriously.

There are three calls to "let" within this passage. Whether we do them is a decision that we have to make and live out daily.

Jesus knew who He was. He had a high sense of self worth and destiny. He was comfortable in who He was and this released Him to become a servant of others. Insecure people cannot serve in the right attitude or mind-set, because they have a need to prove themselves or maintain the appearance of importance. Insecure people seek recognition and acknowledgement of external things; while secure people are secure deep inside. We are all naturally insecure to a greater or lesser degree, in various aspects of our lives. Good attitude comes from walking close with God, and having a sense of worth and security.

#### 6.5. CONCLUSION

So what is humility? Humility is:

- freedom from arrogance
- contentment in God
- thinking of our self and of others soberly
- the fruit of a heart secure in the love of God
- a self-effacement – not caused by timidity or inadequacy or self-consciousness, but resulting from a God-consciousness.

Moses' secret is summarised by the writer of Hebrews:

Heb 11:27. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.

Let us remind ourselves of Paul's call to humility:

Phil 2:3-4. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. {4} Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

And to finish a promise to the humble:

Psa 25:8-10. Good and upright is the LORD; therefore He teaches sinners in the way. {9} The humble He guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way. {10} All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth, to such as keep His covenant and His testimonies.

## 7. STRIFE AND CONTENTION

### 7.1. THE CAUSES OF STRIFE

#### 7.1.1. Pride

The dangers of pride are well documented in Scripture, as is God's opposition to those who allow pride to fill their attitude. Our pride has a detrimental effect upon those people who are around us. Pride is a catalyst which causes strife among people.

Prov 13:10. By pride comes nothing but strife, but with the well-advised is wisdom.

Prov 28:25. He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife, but he who trusts in the LORD will be prospered.

When we consider the second half of these two verses we can conclude that:

1. It is not well-advised to be proud, and strife is not an act of wisdom.
2. The proud are not trusting in the Lord, but their in own strength and abilities.

It is pride that makes us want to dig our heels in and battle it out. It is pride that makes us consider that the issue, and our appearing right is more important than the relationship and the long term consequences.

#### 7.1.2. Anger

Prov 29:22. An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression.

Prov 15:18. A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention.

Scripture is full of warning concerning anger, probably the most famous being:

Eph 4:26-27. "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, {27} nor give place to the devil.

Anger in itself is not necessarily a sin. There are situations where anger is the correct and godly reaction. God Himself is angered by wickedness and stubbornness. A great deal of care is required to ensure that our actions and words when we are angry are not sinful.

Prov 15:1. A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

How we react to provocation determines whether the situation moves towards or away from strife. It's not the first angry word that causes an argument, but the second.

The believer we must always be convinced that the cause of Christ, ergo unity among the brethren, is of greater importance than defending our self.

One source of anger is resentment. We can resent what somebody has said or done, or we can resent circumstances that God has allowed. If not dealt with resentment can lead to the habit of bitterness.

Heb 12:14-15. Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: {15} looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;

### 7.1.3. Envy

Prov 27:4. Wrath is cruel and anger a torrent, but who is able to stand before jealousy?

Prov 14:30. A sound heart is life to the body, but envy is rottenness to the bones.

Cain became a murder because he allowed anger and envy fester into hatred. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery because of their jealousy. Judas betrays Jesus after resenting witnessing a woman's extravagant worship. Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of envy.

James 3:16. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

1 Pet 2:1-2. Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, {2} as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,

Paul makes it clear that love does not envy:

1 Cor 13:4. Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;

### 7.1.4. Hatred

Prov 10:12. Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins.

Hatred is deep seated resentment or anger that rules within the life of the one who hates. It is a murderous spirit.

Mat 5:21-22. "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' {22} "But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

### 7.1.5. Divisiveness

There are those people who enjoy string up strife and causing division. Perhaps this is because they are insecure and fearful of rejection, so they have to divide others so as to possess for themselves.

Prov 16:28. A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends.

Prov 26:21. As charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife.

## 7.2. CARNALITY AND DEMONIC

In spiritual terms we can associate strife with the fallen carnal nature of humanity and with the divisive activity of our spiritual enemy.

We have mentioned Cain and Abel. Then there is Ishmael and Isaac. Paul says that Ishmael's persecution of Isaac typifies how the carnal man has raised himself up against the spiritual man.

Gal 4:29. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.

In Romans and First Corinthians Paul links strife and envy with the flesh.

Rom 13:13-14. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. {14} But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts.

1 Cor 3:3. for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?

James warns us that if there is bitterness, envy and self seeking in a family or in a church, then these provide a doorway for the demonic, bringing confusion and every type of evil.

James 3:16. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

### 7.3. THE FRUIT OF STRIFE

Prov 18:19. A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle.

The divisions and separation caused by strife may be permanent. Even if someone says sorry, things may never return to their previous state, there remains a distancing and weariness.

Prov 17:14. The beginning of strife is like releasing water; therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts.

Strife is likened to a flash flood which has great destructive force, and leaves a landscape permanently scared. Elsewhere waters are synonymous with strife.

Num 20:11-13. Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. {12} Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." {13} This was the water of Meribah, because the children of Israel contended with the LORD, and He was hallowed among them.

Even though he repented, Moses was unable to enter the inheritance because he allowed anger to cause him to strive.

### 7.4. THE AVOIDANCE OF STRIFE

#### 7.4.1. Avoid Contentious People

Proverbs tells us that contentious people cause strife.

Prov 22:10. Cast out the scoffer, and contention will leave; yes, strife and reproach will cease.

Prov 26:20-21. Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases. {21} As charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife.

In light of the New Testament we would add that there is a spiritual enemy who seeks to bring division, but of course he can only work through willing human vessels.

Strife will only cease when contentious people change or leave.

Prov 17:1. Better is a dry morsel with quietness, than a house full of feasting with strife.

Prov 30:33. For as the churning of milk produces butter, and wringing the nose produces blood, so the forcing of wrath produces strife.

Rom 16:17-18. Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. {18} For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.

1 Tim 6:3-5. If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, {4} he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, {5} useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

2 Tim 2:23. But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.

### 7.4.2. Self Control

We must also recognise that there is one person who is able to cause strife, whom we cannot avoid – our self. We must ensure that our carnality is kept under subjection through the power of the cross.

Self-control is the ability to master and hold in subjection our lusts, passions, appetites and emotions. Some people "loose their temper" which means their anger controls them rather than the other way round.

Gal 5:22-23. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, {23} gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

2 Pet 1:5-7. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, {6} to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, {7} to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

Scripture uses the term "slow to wrath" to describe the choice of being in control when under provocation.

Prov 14:29. He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly.

Prov 15:18. A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention.

James 1:19-20. So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; {20} for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

### 7.4.3. A Servant's Heart

As part of conquering the carnal nature within each of us, we have to develop a servant's heart, in like manner to Jesus.

Mark 10:42-45. But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. {43} "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. {44} "And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. {45} "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

One man who demonstrated such a servant's heart was Jonathan. Although he was heir apparent, he was willing for David to reign in his place.

1 Sam 23:17. And he said to him, "Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Even my father Saul knows that."

### 7.5. A CONTENTIOUS HOUSEHOLD

Proverbs is famous for describing the negative experience of leaving with an angry, contentious partner.

Prov 21:9. Better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

Prov 21:19. Better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman.

Prov 25:24. It is better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

Prov 27:15. A continual dripping on a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike;

## 8. RICHES

### 8.1. THE POWER OF WEALTH

Prov 10:15. The rich man's wealth is his strong city; the destruction of the poor is their poverty.

Richs do provide protection. Health insurance, life insurance, pension funds, rainy day funds, investments and old fashioned savings; all these *generally* provide protection and security. In this world it is not hard work that produces money. It is money that produces money, and those who have and those who handle money are the ones who get rich. The rich get richer!

Everybody wants to pay workers and labourers the least they can. Why? Because they are not trying to make you rich, but keep their own riches.

Poverty on the other hand is a trap. The little he has is insufficient for his immediate needs, how can he spare any to sow in investments? The poor have no protection in insurance or savings. They need everything to go alright all the time, nothing to break down, nothing to wear out. But he can only buy second hand goods and sooner or later things do go wrong and the poor man needs to go into debt just to maintain his meager resource.

Interest on debts mount up and soon his standard of living is even more depleted. Finally he owes more than he earns or than all his possessions are worth. In the modern day this means bankruptcy, repossession, homelessness, county Court Judgements and a permanent bad credit

rating (like a branding). In Biblical times it meant being sold with your family into slavery. The poor get poorer.

It should be noted that under the Mosaic Law this slavery was a pathway to recovery. The individual was protected with rights and the slavery was not a permanent thing, being limited to seven years. The idea was not punishment or abasement, but restoration. This slavery was a recovery plan. It was not God's desire that the Israelite be poor, but now that he is it takes time to walk through a process to be freed from the trap.

### 8.2. THE FAILURE OF WEALTH

Prov 18:11. The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his own esteem.

The power and security that riches bring are real, but they are not sure. They *generally* provide protection, but they can fail. In the rich man's own eyes his wealth is invincible, but he fools himself.

Mat 6:19. "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;

Prov 23:5. Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven.

Most people's wealth is tied up in investments, even if they are only placed in a Saving Account. Investments, such as stocks and shares are a man-made system that relies upon impressions, and is used by many as a way of speculating. This speculating is looking for quick personal financial gains, rather than long term investment. Rumours and fears can send the value of stocks and shares tumbling dramatically. Millions of pounds can be wiped off the values of a company in hours. Empires can suddenly crash. Pension funds suddenly be left empty, and individual investors suddenly left destitute. Riches can sprout wings and fly away.

Scripture therefore warns about putting our trust in our riches (or other sources of power / security), instead of putting our trust in the Lord. Because of their power, riches can become an idol, something we chase after or devote our time to, or even lust after.

Psa 62:10. Do not trust in oppression, nor vainly hope in robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart on them.

Prov 11:28. He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage.

1 Tim 6:17. Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

### 8.3. THE LIMITATION OF WEALTH

Money belongs to this world and is therefore temporal and of no value in spiritual or eternal things. When the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus concerning paying taxes, Jesus asked:

Mat 22:20-21. And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" {21} They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

The money was Caesar's. Money today still belongs to this world system, which is not a godly system nor run with the kingdom of God in mind.

Prov 11:4. Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.

Our aim in life must always be God's kingdom and His righteousness. Righteousness is a far greater possession than wealth.

Prov 22:1. A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favour rather than silver and gold.

For all its power wealth cannot satisfy some of the crucial needs of the human heart.

Luke 16:11-13. "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? {12} "And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? {13} "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

The way we handle these things determines what spiritual treasures we will be given. People who cannot break through and surrender their finances to God, suffer spiritual lack in many areas. They are devoid of true riches. Surprising perhaps, it is often those who don't have an abundance who have trouble in surrendering their finances to God. Perhaps they are fearful of being in want, perhaps they are resentful of those who are more wealthy than they are.

Recognise the Limitations of Wealth<sup>14</sup>

Money can buy a house but not a home,

Money can buy companionship but not friendship,

Money can buy entertainment but not happiness,

Money can buy food but not an appetite,

Money can buy a bed but not sleep,

Money can buy a crucifix but not a Saviour.

### 8.4. THE RICH MAN

Prov 28:11. The rich man is wise in his own eyes, but the poor who has understanding searches him out.

Those who are successful in this world, are tempted to become proud and conceited. They confuse wealth with wisdom. They view the security and power that their wealth brings and conclude that they are superior. But their pride can blind them. Even a poor man with understanding will discern the folly of the rich man and see beyond the façade.

### 8.5. THE ATTRACTION OF WEALTH

Prov 19:4. Wealth makes many friends, but the poor is separated from his friend.

Human nature is such that people want to be around those who make them feel better. They want to hang around with the attractive, suave, successful and rich, because it makes them look and feel better. It is as though they believe that these attributes become theirs by association. Conversely they don't want to be seen in public with the unsightly, poor or unusual.

There are those who are attracted to the rich because they seek to benefit from their wealth.

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<sup>14</sup> From J John's "Ten"

Eccl 5:11. When goods increase, they increase who eat them; so what profit have the owners except to see them with their eyes?

Others resent the poor because the “lower the tone” of the area.

Prov 14:20. The poor man is hated even by his own neighbour, but the rich has many friends.

### 8.6. HONOURING GOD

Prov 3:9-10. Honour the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; {10} So your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.

Most believers recognise that they are obliged to tithe into the church. Some are mistaken in thinking that this is the only interest, or right, that God has in our money. God owns the first 10 %, and is interested in how we use the remaining 90 %.

Therefore we are encouraged to “Honour the Lord with [our] possessions”. One way we honour God is through the giving of the firstfruits. In the Israeli farming community this meant the first of the crops and the firstborn of livestock was formally presented to the Lord in recognition that belonged to Him. Some translate this to our modern day business culture to mean pay rises.

Honouring God with our possessions also includes the possessions we already own. We can honour God with our car by giving other people lifts. We can honour God with our kitchen by making someone a meal. We can use what we have at hand to bless other people.

The way we spend our money should also be honouring to God and consistent with the moral requirements of the Word. As in all things God wants to be part of our decision making process. It is best to consider that everything we have as being on loan to us. We are stewards of someone else’s resource, and although God is generous and pays well, we are accountable for how we use it.

Verse ten of Proverbs three says that the result of honouring God with our possessions is abundant supply into our lives.

### 8.7. CO-SIGNING FOR LOANS

A common policy among lending institutions today is to require people with risky credit to have someone co-sign their loan. The co-signer is held financially responsible if the principal borrower defaults on repayment. In effect, the risk in the transaction is being transferred from the lender to the co-signer.

Proverbs warns about being the guarantor for somebody else’s loan, even a close friend. The writer tells us to deliver our selves from such an agreement with all urgency.

Prov 6:1-5. My son, if you become surety for your friend, if you have shaken hands in pledge for a stranger, {2} you are snared by the words of your mouth; you are taken by the words of your mouth. {3} So do this, my son, and deliver yourself; for you have come into the hand of your friend: Go and humble yourself; plead with your friend. {4} Give no sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids. {5} Deliver yourself like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, and like a bird from the hand of the fowler.

Prov 11:15. He who is surety for a stranger will suffer, but one who hates being surety is secure.

Prov 17:18. A man devoid of understanding shakes hands in a pledge, and becomes surety for his friend.

We all find it difficult to refuse a friend, when we are put on the spot. But if we do become the guarantor we run the risk of losing a lot more. We could be held solely responsible for the whole amount of the loan and lose our home, our families resource and security, our children's inheritance and the seed which God has given us for his purposes; and we would most likely lose their friendship anyway.

Scripture does not forbid outright being surety for others. Paul became surety for the runaway slave Onesimus.

Phile 1:18-19. But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account. {19} I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay; not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides.

Paul did so because he knew Onesimus well and was testifying to the change in the man since he became a Christian. He knew that this new believer had no power to repay his debts and so in Christian love Paul makes a sacrifice. In a sense Paul was redeeming this slave out of bondage. He was not being a co-signatory for a risky speculative venture.

It takes wisdom to discern whether or not to be a guarantor for someone, not worldly business wisdom, but spiritual discernment that comes through prayer.

### 8.8. GREED

Prov 23:4. Do not overwork to be rich; because of your own understanding, cease!

Perhaps this verse could be translated as "Do not overwork to be rich; because of your own sanity, cease!" Chasing riches will leave people broken and empty even if they obtain their goal, and the vast majority don't.

Prov 13:7. There is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing; and one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches.

Traditionally this verse has been considered to be saying that the man who strives to be rich may become successful but on that journey he can lose some priceless possessions. Perhaps his marriage fails because he never has time for his wife. Perhaps his children are wayward and estranged because they never knew a father figure. Perhaps his health is permanently damaged through a stressful life style.

Jesus says:

Mat 16:26. "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

On the other hand there are those who have done what this world would consider foolish and sacrificed all. They may look poor, but their purchasing power is in a different realm.

Mat 19:21. Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

The lust for riches is likened to dangerous, fast flowing waters.

1 Tim 6:9-10. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. {10} For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

The NIV actually translates Proverbs 13:7 in a different way:

One man pretends to be rich, yet has nothing; another pretends to be poor, yet has great wealth.<sup>15</sup>

Which warns us about the false images that people use.

## 8.9. GIVING

Prov 11:24. There is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty.

The man who does not understand the principles of sowing and reaping will hold on tightly to his money through fear of being in want. But the man who scatters his seed will find increase. As this verse says there is a right amount to give. To give too much in a foolish irresponsible way may lead to disappointment.

## 8.10. THE FRUIT OF WISDOM

Wisdom speaks from Proverbs and says that those who follow her lead can increase in wealth. It should be noted that such wealth is the fruit of following the process of wisdom.

Prov 8:21. That I may cause those who love me to inherit wealth, that I may fill their treasuries.

Prov 3:16. Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand riches and honour.

Prov 8:18. Riches and honour are with me, enduring riches and righteousness.

These are not unconditional promises to all believers, but general observations concern those who follow wisdom.

Prov 22:4. By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches and honour and life.

## 8.11. DISHONEST GAIN

Prov 28:8. One who increases his possessions by usury and extortion gathers it for him who will pity the poor.

Prov 13:11. Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished, but he who gathers by labour will increase.

Prov 22:16. He who oppresses the poor to increase his riches, and he who gives to the rich, will surely come to poverty.

Prov 28:22. A man with an evil eye hastens after riches, and does not consider that poverty will come upon him.

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<sup>15</sup>*The Holy Bible : New International Version.*

## 8.12. CONCLUSIONS

The believer can:

- Recognise the strengths and weaknesses of wealth.
- Recognise that money belongs to the system of this world.
- Determine to honour God with their wealth
- Seek to work through a recovery process in order to move out of debt
- Seek first God's kingdom and trust in the Lord

Prov 30:8. Remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food allotted to me;

## 9. THE POOR

Deut 15:11. "For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'

Mark 14:7. "For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always.

We live in a divided and unequal world. More than half the population, that is 2.6 billion people, live on less than £1.20 a day. Half of those people live on less than half that amount.

There are occasions in Scripture when poverty resulted from direct judgement from God, but more often than not poverty results from exploitation of poor or the result of living in a fallen world.

All people were created in the image of God, but the rich and the poor are not equal in this world.

### 9.1. POWERLESSNESS

Prov 10:15. The rich man's wealth is his strong city; the destruction of the poor is their poverty.

For a discussion of this proverb see section 8.1. The Power of Wealth.

But what is poverty. A definition of poverty phrased by the World Bank is as follows:

Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not being able to go to school, not knowing how to read, not being able to speak properly. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation, and freedom.

Prov 22:7. The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.

The power and influence money brings ensure that the rich rule. The rich western nations use their power and influence to protect their interests and those of their companies. This ensures that global trade practices are weighted in their favour, and the poor under-developed countries are exploited.

Rich individuals can buy influence and can corrupt the legal and political systems. The Mosaic Law forbade the charging of interest on loans, but whether this law was adhered to it is not certain, but by New Testament times the charging of usury was normal practice<sup>16</sup>. Currently in our society credit is cheap and people are taking advantage of this cheap money. But we would do well to remember that the *borrower is servant to the lender*. Interest rates can rapidly change, circumstances suddenly alter and suddenly we are in deep debt and unable to meet the repayments. Repossession quickly takes away our goods but the debt remains and the bondage can last for years.

Prov 18:23. The poor man uses entreaties, but the rich answers roughly.

Riches can make a person arrogant. Poverty can ensure that people speak carefully, not willing to cause offence.

### 9.2. SOCIALLY ISOLATED

Proverbs describes how society reacts to those in poverty.

Prov 19:7. All the brothers of the poor hate him; how much more do his friends go far from him! He may pursue them with words, yet they abandon him.

Prov 14:20. The poor man is hated even by his own neighbour, but the rich has many friends.

Prov 19:4. Wealth makes many friends, but the poor is separated from his friend.

How do we react to the tramp, the beggar, the scruffy or the destitute? The normal reaction is not to notice them. We look away and we do not allow our mind to consider them. When forced to make a response immediately we are defensive and intolerant, assuming their state is due to their failing.

### 9.3. THE STARVING THIEF

Prov 6:30-31. People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy himself when he is starving. {31} Yet when he is found, he must restore sevenfold; he may have to give up all the substance of his house.

This sevenfold restitution is greater than the twofold restitution called for by the Mosaic Law<sup>17</sup>. Why the difference? Perhaps Proverbs describes the social law at the time?

It has been suggested that the difference may be because the Law made numerous provisions to prevent poor people from starving. These included:

- The third-year tithe.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Mat 25:27 'So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.

<sup>17</sup> Exo 22:4 "If the theft is certainly found alive in his hand, whether it is an ox or donkey or sheep, he shall restore double.

<sup>18</sup> Deut 14:28-29. At the end of every third year you shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates. {29} "And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.

- The Gleaning<sup>19</sup>
- The release of debts in the Sabbatical year<sup>20</sup>
- The temporary sale of property<sup>21</sup>
- Mandatory charity loans at zero interest<sup>22</sup>
- Voluntary indentured service<sup>23</sup>

With such a comprehensive social system, there would be no excuse for someone to steal in order to eat. This could be why the restoration was made so much harder.

### 9.4. GOD'S CONCERN

Although Proverbs may highlight the causes of some peoples' poverty and puts the blame on their own shoulders, nevertheless the book also describes God's compassion towards those in need.

The poor are vulnerable. People have always taken advantage of their powerlessness, and they still do.

Prov 14:31. He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who honours Him has mercy on the needy.

Prov 17:5. He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.

Prov 19:17. He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, and He will pay back what he has given.

The Mosaic Law was full of instruction of how society should care for the poor, and assist them in recovering from their bondage.

Deut 15:7-11. "If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, {8} "but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs. {9} "Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,' and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to the LORD against you, and it become sin among you.

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<sup>19</sup> Lev 19:9-10. 'When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. {10} 'And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the LORD your God.

<sup>20</sup> Deut 15:1-3. At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts. {2} "And this is the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent anything to his neighbour shall release it; he shall not require it of his neighbour or his brother, because it is called the Lord's release. {3} "Of a foreigner you may require it; but you shall give up your claim to what is owed by your brother,

<sup>21</sup> Lev 25:23-34. (The land was returned in the year of Jubilee, or redeemed before hand.)

<sup>22</sup> Deut 15:7-11.

<sup>23</sup> Lev 25:39-55.

{10} "You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand. {11} "For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'

Equally the New Testament demands that care should be shown to the poor particularly by the believers.

Luke 14:12-14. Then He also said to him who invited Him, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbours, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. {13} "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. {14} "And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

Rom 15:26. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.

Gal 2:10. They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.

## 9.5. INDIFFERENCE TO THE POOR

A warning is given to those who harden their heart to the needs of others.

Prov 21:13. Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard.

Prov 17:5. He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.

Israel neglect of and exploitation of the poor was one the sins for which God judged their nation.

Amos 2:6-7. Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals. {7} They pant after the dust of the earth which is on the head of the poor, and pervert the way of the humble. A man and his father go in to the same girl, to defile My holy name.

## 9.6. KINDNESS TOWARDS

The believer is expected to show kindness towards those in need, and in doing so they receive the blessing of God.

Prov 14:21. He who despises his neighbour sins; but he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he.

Paul quotes Psalm 112<sup>24</sup>:

2 Cor 9:9. As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

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<sup>24</sup> Psa 112:9 He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever; His horn will be exalted with honour.

Prov 22:9. He who has a generous eye will be blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor. It is a normal, and yet a sinful human reaction to apply selective viewing when it comes to the poor.

Prov 28:27. He who gives to the poor will not lack, but he who hides his eyes will have many curses.

The next verse describes not only giving to the poor but defending them in society. The righteous are to work in society to ensure justice and equality to all men. This is not describing social care, but social action.

Prov 29:7. The righteous considers the cause of the poor, but the wicked does not understand such knowledge.

Prov 29:14. The king who judges the poor with truth, his throne will be established forever.

### 9.7. POVERTY CAN BE CAUSED BY LAZINESS

Poverty can be the result of carelessness, foolishness or laziness.

Prov 10:4. He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.

The person with a slack hand attends work, and may go through the motions, but they apply no effort. Such an attitude will cause poverty, their own and even their work colleagues. Equally those who seek to free wheel spiritually will end up spiritually poor and malnourished. In the same manner those who are slack within their relationships, will find that the same relationships will yield less and less.

Diligence is needed in every department of our life. Care and diligence can mean that work and effort are minimised. It is easier to maintain equipment, relationships and even morality, than it is to repair or replace that which is broken through lack of attention.

Prov 13:23. Much food is in the fallow ground of the poor, and for lack of justice there is waste.

Fallow ground in a person's life means wasted opportunity. Hopeless despair can prevent a person escaping the trap they are in, by causing paralysis. Other versions translate this verse in a different way.

Prov 13:23. A poor person's field might produce plenty of food, but others often steal it away.<sup>25</sup>

Here the poor are kept in poverty because of repression. In our world today world economic heightens the problems of the third-world farmers. Many are paid a pittance for their produce by wealthy global companies, who then make large profits for their executives and share-holders. The church as sought to address this through Fair Trade products, where the farmers are paid a descent price for the produce.

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<sup>25</sup> New Century Version

Prov 24:30-34. I went by the field of the lazy man, and by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; {31} and there it was, all overgrown with thorns; its surface was covered with nettles; its stone wall was broken down. {32} When I saw it, I considered it well; I looked on it and received instruction: {33} A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest; {34} so shall your poverty come like a prowler, and your need like an armed man.

The lazy man takes no thought for tomorrow. He sees no further than his immediate appetite. A man devoid of understanding fails to think things through. A vineyard requires diligence in order to be fruitful. But this man has shown none. It is full of weeds and the wall which protects it from animals is broken down.

The man's lack of labour did not mean that his fields were empty, but they were full of worthless things. He had not deliberately sown anything, but he received a harvest of weeds. His failure to take action meant that the wrong type of things bore fruit in his life. People who are spiritually lazy will reap a harvest from the flesh. If we do not sow to the spirit then by default we are allowing the flesh to propagate.<sup>26</sup> Spiritual maturity and a spiritual harvest never come without labour. There must be sowing, there must be watering, there must be weeding, before there can be a good harvest.

The stone wall protects the field and the inheritance, like the wall around a city. Laziness allows the protection around our life to be broken down, such that robbers and squatters can invade our lives.

### 9.8. POVERTY CAN BE CAUSED BY LIVING FOR PLEASURE

Prov 21:17. He who loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich.

Another possible cause of poverty is living for pleasure. The lazy man's pleasure was rest, and as a result he made no money. Some people have money but squander it on their appetites. An example of this is the Prodigal Son.

Luke 15:13-14. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. {14} But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want.

This son was the beneficiary of somebody else's labour and diligence. But having watched his father work hard for years, this young man decides that this was not the life for him. Perhaps he used phrases like "life is too short" and "enjoy it why you can".

Not only can living for pleasure cause monetary want, it will also result in spiritual poverty. We can not love and serve God and at the same time be chasing the pleasures of this world. Paul describes the attitude of those in the last days:

2 Tim 3:4. ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,

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<sup>26</sup> Gen 3:17-18 Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. {18} Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field.

Spiritual poverty results from investing our time, abilities and resource in things other than God's kingdom. The kingdom of God demands to be put unequivocally first in all our lives, and at times seeking God's kingdom and his righteousness may be diametrically opposed to comfort and pleasure.

The apostles warned the early disciples that:

Acts 14:22.       strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

Being a follower of Jesus is not meant to be the easy option, but rather the strait and narrow way, and the way where you are required to take up your cross. Jesus said:

Mat 6:24.        No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Surely we can also conclude that you cannot serve God and pleasure.

### 9.9. CHURCH'S RESPONSIBILITY

We have seen how God, through the law made provision for the poor and vulnerable in society. Special care was to be shown for the widow, the orphan and the foreigner. In years to come the prophets rebuked Israel for not only failing to obey these commandments, but also for actually exploiting the people they should have been protecting.

Most damningly the people of God were rebuked for performing pious religious activities, whilst neglecting social care.

Isa 1:10-17.     Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah: {11} "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats. {12} "When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts? {13} Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies; I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. {14} Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. {15} When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. {16} "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, {17} Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.

Isaiah repeats the theme later on.

Isa 58:1-7.     "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. {2} Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching God.

{3} 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?' "In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your labourers. {4} Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high. {5} Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? {6} "Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? {7} Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?"

In the New Testament Jesus rebuked the religious leaders of the day for the same failure:

Mat 23:23. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

Luke 20:46-47. "Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, {47} "who devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."

### 9.9.1. How?

How is the church to engage in such works?

#### 1. Representation

The church should speak up for and represent the underprivileged, seeking justice in the community and world.

#### 2. Social Care

The church has traditionally been associated social care. Directly helping the poor, homeless and needy.

#### 3. Social Action

Equally the church has historically been involved in social action, working to eradicate the causes of distress, poverty and discrimination. Prime examples of this are; education, abolition of slavery, mental health reform, prison reform and stopping children working in mines and as chimney sweeps.

### 9.9.2. How things went wrong

In the twentieth century the church disengaged from the above roles. This was because of a number of reasons, which can be generalised under the following:

#### 1. Reaction to Liberal Theology

At the end of the nineteenth century Liberal Theology was gaining an ever stronger foot hold within denominations. Leading theologians from this group, reacting to gross social injustice and poverty, developed the "kingdom now" doctrine which described the church working for social

change which would bring about God's kingdom on earth. It was these theologians who described this erroneous doctrine as a "social gospel".

Evangelicals understandably reacted to this threat by neglecting most things in order to concentrate on preaching the gospel. In order to distance themselves from the Social Gospel movement evangelicals also moved away from social care / action.

### 2. Expecting Jesus' Imminent Return

The Dispensational Teaching popularised within the Scofield Bible had a profound effect upon people's thinking. Convinced that Jesus would return at any moment, a belief that appeared to be justified by the two world wars, believers were reluctant to get involved in social action that would take a great deal of effort over a number of years to achieve any good.

### 3. Congregations becoming Middle Class

As people got saved they stop wasting their money on excessive drink or smoking. This resulted in them having a greater amount of money to spend in other ways. The first generations of believers may have poured their money into the church, such as the Methodist churches built across England and the chapels built across Wales. Subsequent generations were not so kingdom minded and the church became more introvert and less likely to engage with those regarded as undesirable.

## 10. STRONG DRINK

There is a great deal of wisdom given within the Book of Proverbs, and Scripture as a whole concerning alcohol. Believers would do well to heed the warnings and restrictions given and to understand the reasons for these.

The drinking of wine within Bible times is well known, but most Old Testament references to strong drink actually refer to beer, the brewing of which was a thriving industry in ancient times. When the storage of fresh clean water could be difficult, alcoholic beverages such as wine had the advantage that the alcohol would ensure that no germs etc were present in the drink.

### 10.1. AS A METAPHOR

In many prophetic statements (Old and New Testament) wine is used as a metaphor of the impending judgment of God.

Psa 75:7-8. But God is the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another. {8} For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is fully mixed, and He pours it out; surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth drain and drink down.

Jer 25:27. "Therefore you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Drink, be drunk, and vomit! Fall and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you.'"

Isa 63:1-6. Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this One who is glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength?; "I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save." {2} Why is Your apparel red, and Your garments like one who treads in the winepress? {3} "I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me. For I have trodden them in My anger, and trampled them in My fury; their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, and I have stained all My robes. {4} For the day of vengeance is in My heart, and the year of My redeemed has come. {5} I looked, but there was no one to help, and I wondered that there was no one to uphold; therefore My own arm brought salvation for Me; and My own fury, it sustained Me. {6} I have trodden down the peoples in My anger, made them drunk in My fury, and brought down their strength to the earth."

The intoxicating effect of wine is also used figuratively to describe sins such as fornication and violence.

Prov 4:17. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence.

Drunkenness is also spoken of figuratively in the Bible to describe a helpless people whose ways have brought them punishment from the Lord.

Isa 29:9. Pause and wonder! Blind yourselves and be blind! They are drunk, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with intoxicating drink.

Jer 13:13-14. Then you shall say to them, "Thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will fill all the inhabitants of this land; even the kings who sit on David's throne, the priests, the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; with drunkenness! {14} "And I will dash them one against another, even the fathers and the sons together," says the LORD. "I will not pity nor spare nor have mercy, but will destroy them."

Ezek 23:30-34. 'I will do these things to you because you have gone as a harlot after the Gentiles, because you have become defiled by their idols. {31} 'You have walked in the way of your sister; therefore I will put her cup in your hand.' {32} "Thus says the Lord GOD: 'You shall drink of your sister's cup, the deep and wide one; you shall be laughed to scorn And held in derision; it contains much. {33} You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, the cup of horror and desolation, the cup of your sister Samaria. {34} You shall drink and drain it, you shall break its shards, and tear at your own breasts; for I have spoken,' Says the Lord GOD.

### 10.2. POSITIVE ATTRIBUTES OF WINE

A little wine can produce merriment, or can be used as a sedative for those in great distress.

Psa 104:15. And wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengthens man's heart.

Eccl 10:19. A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes merry; but money answers everything.

Prov 31:6-7. Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those who are bitter of heart. {7} Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.

In moderation wine has slight medicinal value. The Apostle Paul recommended a little wine for a physical ailment.

1 Tim 5:23. No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.

In the Old Testament wine was an important part of the sacrifices the Israelites made at the Tabernacle.

Exo 29:40-41. "With the one lamb shall be one-tenth of an ephah of flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of pressed oil, and one-fourth of a hin of wine as a drink offering. {41} "And the other lamb you shall offer at twilight; and you shall offer with it the grain offering and the drink offering, as in the morning, for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the LORD.

In the New Testament wine is paramount in the celebration communion.

1 Cor 11:25. In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

### 10.3. NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL

#### 10.3.1. Alcohol effects our ability to discern

The priests in the Old Testament were strictly forbidden strong drink whilst they were working at the Tabernacle or Temple. The reason for this was so they might clearly discern between what is holy and what is unholy.

Lev 10:9-11. "Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, {10} "that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, {11} "and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them by the hand of Moses."

A person who came to the tabernacle to make an offering was allowed to drink wine with the sacrifices.

#### 10.3.2. Causes People to Err in Judgment

Alcohol works on the brain and central nervous system and affects a person's judgement, self-control and co-ordination. When under the influence of alcohol people can easily make bad choices and to forget good decisions they previously made.

People do foolish and risky things when under the influence of drink. Dangers are underestimated and abilities exaggerated. Our reflexes are also dulled.

Isa 28:7-8. But they also have erred through wine, and through intoxicating drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through intoxicating drink, they are swallowed up by wine, they are out of the way through intoxicating drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. {8} For all tables are full of vomit and filth; no place is clean.

Believers are to exercise self-control, and this is impeded or lost during drunkenness.

### 10.3.3. Promises Merriment but actually brings more problems

Luke 21:34. "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.

Carousing can weigh your heart down. Having lifted a person to heights of merriment, they are dropped into an abyss of despair and sickness. The poisonous effects of alcohol have a lasting and damaging effect upon many of the organs and systems of the body.

When abused as a sedative people can quickly become addicted and find that it no longer brings any comfort. The effect of the alcohol upon the person's self control means that rather than helping them to forget their problems, their minds are uncontrollably flooded with their sorrows and grief.

### 10.3.4. Inflames the Passions

Wine inflames the passion, but removes judgement making men mock and deride. Alcohol also makes men fight.

Prov 20:1. Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.

A lot of sexual sin and abuse happen because of the effect of drink; and many teenage pregnancies happen because of the influence of alcohol.

Isa 5:11. Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may follow intoxicating drink; who continue until night, till wine inflames them!

### 10.3.5. Always Ends in Woe

Prov 23:29-35. Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? {30} Those who linger long at the wine, those who go in search of mixed wine. {31} Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly; {32} at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper. {33} Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will utter perverse things. {34} Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying: {35} "They have struck me, but I was not hurt; they have beaten me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?"

Those who participate in alcoholic abuse make fools of themselves, squandering their time, money, health and relationships.

Short term pleasure can cause long term sorrow: Broken homes, wrecked marriages and deep regrets.

## 10.4. DRUNKENNESS CONDEMNED

Drunkenness is consistently condemned within Scripture.

When God declared his judgments against the nations, alcoholic abuse was one of the sins often listed.

- Isa 5:11-12. Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may follow intoxicating drink; who continue until night, till wine inflames them! {12} The harp and the strings, the tambourine and flute, and wine are in their feasts; but they do not regard the work of the LORD, nor consider the operation of His hands.
- Isa 5:22. Woe to men mighty at drinking wine, woe to men valiant for mixing intoxicating drink,
- Isa 28:1. Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower which is at the head of the verdant valleys, to those who are overcome with wine!
- Joel 1:5. Awake, you drunkards, and weep; and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the new wine, for it has been cut off from your mouth.
- 1 Cor 6:9-10. Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, {10} nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.
- Gal 5:19-21. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, {20} idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, {21} envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

### 10.5. RESTRICTIONS

#### 10.5.1. Those in Leadership & Ministry

- Lev 10:8-11. Then the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying: {9} "Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations
- Titus 1:7. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money,
- 1 Tim 3:2-3. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behaviour, hospitable, able to teach; {3} not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous;
- Prov 31:3-5. Do not give your strength to women, nor your ways to that which destroys kings. {4} It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes intoxicating drink; {5} Lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the justice of all the afflicted.

### 10.5.2. During Fasting or times of Consecration

Num 6:2-4. "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When either a man or woman consecrates an offering to take the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the LORD, {3} 'he shall separate himself from wine and similar drink; he shall drink neither vinegar made from wine nor vinegar made from similar drink; neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh grapes or raisins. {4} 'All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, from seed to skin.

## 10.6. EXAMPLES OF ABUSE

### 10.6.1. Noah

Gen 9:20-21. And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. {21} Then he drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent.

Gen 9:24-25. So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him. {25} Then he said: "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants He shall be to his brethren."

### 10.6.2. Lot

Gen 19:32-33. "Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve the lineage of our father." {33} So they made their father drink wine that night. And the firstborn went in and lay with her father, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose.

## 10.7. ALCOHOLISM IN OUR CULTURE

### 10.7.1. Dangers

**Young people:** This group is drinking more alcohol and drinking more often. They are the heavier drinking section of the population. They start at about 12 years of age and by 15 most youngsters have tasted it. Twelve percent of 16 to 19 year olds show signs of alcohol dependency.

**Health:** One in four males admitted to hospital have an alcohol-related problem. Deaths from liver disorders are ten times greater in heavy drinkers than in non-drinkers.

**Driving:** 1 in 7 of all road deaths are alcohol related.

**Family:** 30 % of child-abuse cases and 40 % of domestic violence are alcohol related. Separated and divorced men seek solace above the average drinker.

**Crime:** Research has shown that 30 % of sexual offences are alcohol related; burglaries 33 %, street crimes 50 %, pubs and clubs 85 %, murders 65 % and stabbing 75 %.

**Industry:** Employers report that 75 % of problems at work are alcohol related, as are 25 % of workplace accidents. Up to 14 million working days are lost annually through alcohol-related problems.

**Accidents:** Most drowning in unsupervised bodies of water are alcohol related. Intoxicated persons swim alone at night. Alcohol induces them to stay in the water too long, leading to hypertension and cardiovascular collapse.

**Falls:** Studies have revealed that at 100 mg alcohol in 100 ml blood, surging occurs when standing. Slower reflexes and diminished co-ordination mean heavier falls.

**Burns:** Alcohol causes drowsiness. People fall asleep while smoking. The condition also impedes speedy escape.

### 10.7.2. Deaths

28,000 deaths occur annually through alcohol-related incidents. 4,000 are directly due to alcohol annually in England and Wales. Alcohol is a major factor in accidents and violence experienced by young men. Alcohol is seventh in the list of causes of death in the world. There are over three quarters of a million (774,000) such deaths annually world wide.

### 10.7.3. Social Costs of Alcohol Misuse

£964 million per year through alcohol-related sickness. £222 million through unemployment, £150 million NHS costs, and police and court expenses £50 million.

## 10.8. WHY DOES OUR CULTURE PRODUCE SO MANY ADDICTS?

### 10.8.1. Quick Fix Mentality

Our society is fixated with quick and simple answers and easy solutions. People in the world want to take a pill to make everything better. Others want to eat a new health food to make everything better. Some believers want to stand in a prayer line and have a “spiritual high” moment to straighten out there life.

It is the same mentality that convinces people that they can find solace, escapism or purpose in drinking.

### 10.8.2. Lovers of Pleasure

Our culture is heavily oriented toward pleasure, sport and entertainment. External experiences sought to bring purpose and value to life.

### 10.8.3. Lack of Family and Community

There are more people in the world now than there ever has been, and yet despite of the millions of people around us a huge proportion of all people are not experiencing healthy or meaningful relationships.

Our culture suffers from disrupted family life. Few families now sit down to share a meal together. Both parents often have to work and have differing shift patterns. With the majority of marriages failing, many children are brought up apart from one of their natural parents, and perhaps with step brothers / sisters. Children who grow up in fragmented homes often experience internal abandonment.

There is an enormous loss of community. No longer are people born in a town where they will spend the whole of their lives. The average person moves about every three years, often moving away from the support of extended family members or ongoing close friendships.

### 10.8.4. Stressful Life Style

Ours is a high-stress culture. People suffer from high levels of anxiety. The rat-race is getting faster.

### 10.8.5. Unreal Expectations

People have unreal expectations about life. They expect a long life of trouble free pleasure and living for self. There is a denial of the limitations of life. People don't deal with problems, illness or death very well.

## 10.9. CONCLUSIONS

We must recognise the potential danger that exists in drinking alcohol. It is a drug, and can quickly become addictive.

Although the Bible does not forbid the taking of alcohol, it does condemn drunkenness, and often there is a fine line between the two.

A Christian does have a responsibility in the way of example and older Christians should be a role model for the younger.

Rom 14:21. It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.

Paul's words should be taken to heart:

1 Cor 6:12. All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

Rom 13:13-14. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. {14} But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts.

## 11. CHILDREN & PARENTS

### 11.1. INTRODUCTION

Scripture, and Proverbs in particular, has a lot to say about the raising of children and about the relationships between parents and children. Family life is one of the most important aspects of human life and social order, and it is a fundamental building block of God's creative order.

Gen 2:18. And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

Working with God Adam did his best to find a suitable companion. When all the alternatives were used up then God single-handedly provide Adam a wife.<sup>27</sup> Only now could everything be pronounced as being very good.

Throughout Genesis we see God raising up and dealing with families: Noah, Abraham, Jacob. With the coming of the Law, the central pillar of the revelation devotes two of the ten commandments to family life.

Exo 20:12. "Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

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<sup>27</sup> Gen 2:20-22 So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. {21} And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. {22} Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.

Exo 20:14. "You shall not commit adultery.

Those without family care in society, the widows, orphans and aliens, were given special provision in the law for social care.

The Psalmist tells us:

Psa 68:6. God sets the solitary in families; he brings out those who are bound into prosperity; but the rebellious dwell in a dry land.

The Book of Proverbs gives a realistic overview on the subject of raising children, offering sound advice and defines clear principles. However it makes no guarantees as to how a child will turn out. Children may be given an excellent family life and yet still grow up to curse, mock, and scorn their parents<sup>28</sup>. We all still have our own free will.

## 11.2. HUMAN NATURE

Prov 22:15. Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him.

Prov 19:18. Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction.

Modern western philosophy believes that people are basically good. Children are thought to come into this world in a morally pure, pristine state. They are then "socialized" into harmful, hurtful patterns by parents and society.

The Bible of course paints a very different picture.

Psa 51:5. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.

We are not only sinful in our choices, more fundamentally we are sinful in our nature - born sinners, born with inherent weaknesses and tendencies.

Being born a sinner does not release me from my responsibility or the guilt of my choices and actions. God requires that we all confess our sin, our weakness and our need of His grace and salvation.

Prov 22:15. Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him.

Although children are seen as a blessing<sup>29</sup>, they are nevertheless born with sin resident in their heart and tend toward evil if left to follow their own path.

## 11.3. DISCIPLESHIP

Prov 22:6. Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.

Good families, like good marriages, don't just happen. It takes planned, deliberate and consistent effort to rear children correctly. It is not a case of just providing food, clothing and shelter until the child is old enough to be self-sufficient. The young life needs to be equipped emotionally, fed

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<sup>28</sup> Prov 30:11 There is a generation that curses its father, And does not bless its mother.

<sup>29</sup> Psa 127:3 Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward.

with wisdom and shown the art of doing life well. He needs to learn about the privileges and responsibilities of living within a community. He needs to learn that there are boundaries in life. Most importantly the family is the place where unconditional love, forgiveness / grace, openness / reality and authentic spirituality are demonstrated.

This is the way that a family should “train up a child in the way he should go”.

Our modern western culture is discovering the painful truth that there is no substitute for a solid, stable home life. When parenting skills are poor, when parents are absent or negligent, children can be ill-equipped for coping life or for participating in society. Children who have not benefited from good parents, have no example to follow and repeat the same mistakes.

Society is ever only one generation away from anarchy, and when family life is allowed to swiftly deteriorate, dysfunctional communities soon result.

The prophet Malachi reveals the spiritual out-working of this process.

Mal 4:6.           And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."

### 11.4. FATHERS & MOTHERS

Prov 1:8.           My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother;

Prov 6:20-22.     My son, keep your father's command, and do not forsake the law of your mother. {21} Bind them continually upon your heart; tie them around your neck. {22} When you roam, they will lead you; when you sleep, they will keep you; and when you awake, they will speak with you.

Scripture clearly teaches that both parents are responsible for rearing their children, and for bringing them up in the knowledge of the Lord. However the overall responsibility lies with the father. Much of the book of Proverbs is set in the context of a father teaching his child.

Prov 4:1-5.        Hear, my children, the instruction of a father, and give attention to know understanding; {2} For I give you good doctrine: Do not forsake my law. {3} When I was my father's son, tender and the only one in the sight of my mother, {4} He also taught me, and said to me: "Let your heart retain my words; keep my commands, and live. {5} Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth.

A home environment is described where parents give their children valuable gifts such as wisdom, self-appreciation, understanding, and humility. Discipline is also a part of this instruction.

In describing the invaluable role of the woman in building the home, proverbs tells us that her success depends upon her wisdom.

Prov 14:1.         The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her hands.

The end of Proverbs gives an example of the perfect wife and mother, devoted to building her home.

Prov 31:10-29. Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. {11} The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain. {12} She does him good and not evil All the days of her life. {13} She seeks wool and flax, and willingly works with her hands. {14} She is like the merchant ships, she brings her food from afar. {15} She also rises while it is yet night, and provides food for her household, and a portion for her maidservants. {16} She considers a field and buys it; from her profits she plants a vineyard. {17} She girds herself with strength, and strengthens her arms.

{18} She perceives that her merchandise is good, and her lamp does not go out by night. {19} She stretches out her hands to the distaff, and her hand holds the spindle. {20} She extends her hand to the poor, yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy. {21} She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household is clothed with scarlet. {22} She makes tapestry for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple. {23} Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land.

{24} She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies sashes for the merchants. {25} Strength and honour are her clothing; she shall rejoice in time to come. {26} She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness. {27} She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. {28} Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: {29} "Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all."

A summary list of her attributes are:

- Loyal
- Hardworking
- Selfless
- Wise and Prudent
- Industrious
- Generous
- She plans ahead
- She is watchful

Whatever the blessings she is enjoying at the moment, verse 25 speaks of the good things she has laid up for her future "She shall rejoice in time to come."

Not only does she receive the gratitude of her husband but "her children rise up and call her blessed."

### 11.5. PARENTING

So what are some of the tasks of the parents?

#### 11.5.1. God's Word

Scripture requires parents to teach their children the Word of God, sharing with them their own experiences and testimonies. The child's understanding of God, their own life and their sense of morality is to come from this instruction. This is to be done as a priority and it takes far more than teaching Bible stories.

Deut 6:6-9. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. {7} You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. {8} You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. {9} You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

For this to be effective the word of God has to have a fundamental place in the life of the parents. Daily reading and study and a life long application is required.

### 11.5.2. Authentic Spirituality

Children can quickly see through sham. Our own spiritual development should be visible to the household.

1 Tim 4:15. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.

We need to model a prayerful, faith filled spiritual walk. In our position of authority we model the role of God. Those children who are abused by their fathers, grow up to be adults who cannot approach God as Father.

### 11.5.3. Wisdom

Prov 2:1-5. My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, {2} So that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; {3} Yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, {4} If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; {5} Then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.

Proverbs stresses that parents are to teach their children Godly wisdom; sound principles for life. Parents can teach insights from their own experiences and struggles, sharing from their successes as well as their failures.

### 11.5.4. A Good Example

Whatever parents teach, they produce what they are. Any instruction has to be backed by our lifestyle. For that reason we have to own the teaching, applying consistently in our own life. We are to demonstrate patience, kindness, generosity and integrity. We have to earn the respect of our children.

We are to model truth as well as preach it.

### 11.5.5. Discipline

Disciplining our children is not pleasant, but necessary. Failure to do so can bring long term pain to the life of the child and to others, including the parents themselves. The pattern for correcting children is given by God himself.

Prov 3:11-12. My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction; {12} for whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights.

Discipline should be the demonstration of loving concern, as well as the enforcing of standards.

Prov 13:24. He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly.

A child might grow up and feel the lack of parental guidance he received proved that his parents didn't have time for him, weren't concerned for him or that they hated him.

Prov 19:18. Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction.

Prov 29:15. The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.

There is only a certain amount of time when a young life is malleable and can be formed and directly. Left to long and correction is in vain since the mould is set.

Prov 23:13-14. Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. {14} You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell.

Punishing wrong doing helps steer the young life from more powerful forms of crime and sin and ultimately keeps them from destruction.

By itself discipline is insufficient to cause children to develop into strong adults. Encouragement, loving affirmation and an investment of time are also required.

### 11.6. WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

Prov 22:6. Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.

Many people have quoted this verse in prayer as though it was a promise of God. Rather than being a promise, it is a wise observation and as such it is a generalisation.

Unfortunately all the careful good parents put into a child can be undone by the exercise of their own will. Children may receive excellent examples, sound instruction and correct discipline, but they still can refuse the path shown them by their parents.

The father in Proverbs warns his son of peer pressure:

Prov 1:10-18. My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. {11} If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait to shed blood; let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause; {12} Let us swallow them alive like Sheol, and whole, like those who go down to the Pit; {13} We shall find all kinds of precious possessions, we shall fill our houses with spoil; {14} Cast in your lot among us, let us all have one purse"; {15} My son, do not walk in the way with them, keep your foot from their path; {16} For their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood. {17} Surely, in vain the net is spread In the sight of any bird; {18} But they lie in wait for their own blood, they lurk secretly for their own lives.

Proverbs warns that:

- A child may grow up to be lazy<sup>30</sup>, abusive<sup>31</sup>, or immoral<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Prov 10:5. He who gathers in summer is a wise son; He who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame.

<sup>31</sup> Prov 19:26. He who mistreats his father and chases away his mother Is a son who causes shame and brings reproach.

- A child may turn out to be a scoffer, rejecting instruction and rebuke<sup>33</sup>.
- A child may grow up to despise his parents<sup>34</sup>.
- A child might rob his parents and not even see it as wrong<sup>35</sup>.
- A child may grow up to curse, mock, and scorn his parents<sup>36</sup>.

Given this sobering reality, God calls us as parents to demonstrate lives of wisdom, truth, and service to our children, knowing that they may or may not choose to follow in that path. Ultimately, no parent can force a child to honour either them or God; that is a choice that each of us makes on our own. We as parents are simply called to do our best and leave the results to God.

### 11.6.1. Testimony of the Young Fool

Prov 5:9-14. Lest you give your honour to others, and your years to the cruel one; {10} lest aliens be filled with your wealth, and your labours go to the house of a foreigner; {11} and you mourn at last, when your flesh and your body are consumed, {12} and say: "How I have hated instruction, and my heart despised correction! {13} I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined my ear to those who instructed me! {14} I was on the verge of total ruin, in the midst of the assembly and congregation."

This young man fell not because of the lack of teaching, but because of his deliberate lack of learning. Paths that promised pleasure brought him to total ruin. Verse 14 is interesting. It wasn't the young man's environment that was lacking, he was surrounded by wisdom and righteousness. It was his own choices. People can wither and die spiritually, even in the midst of a great church, because of their own choices.

### 11.7. HONOURING OUR PARENTS

Many of us are parents, but all of us are children. Proverbs warns us several times against mistreating our parents:

- Our lives can be destructive to our parents<sup>37</sup>.
- We are to respect our parents all of our lives<sup>38</sup>.
- Disrespecting our parents causes damage to us<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Prov 29:3 Whoever loves wisdom makes his father rejoice, But a companion of harlots wastes his wealth.

<sup>33</sup> Prov 13:1 A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.

<sup>34</sup> Prov 15:20 A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish man despises his mother.

<sup>35</sup> Prov 28:24 Whoever robs his father or his mother, and says, "It is no transgression," the same is companion to a destroyer.

<sup>36</sup> Prov 30:11 There is a generation that curses its father, and does not bless its mother.

Prov 30:17 The eye that mocks his father, and scorns obedience to his mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it.

<sup>37</sup> Prov 19:26 He who mistreats his father and chases away his mother is a son who causes shame and brings reproach.

<sup>38</sup> Prov 23:22 Listen to your father who begot you, And do not despise your mother when she is old.

- We are not to enrich ourselves at our parents' expense<sup>40</sup>.
- How we live affects our parents for better or worse<sup>41</sup>.

Scripture commands that we honour our father and mother, and says that showing disrespect is a shameful thing. This is not easy for someone who has had an abusive upbringing. In such cases the believer must nevertheless seek to honour the office of the parent, even though they may feel resentment against the person. Then by walking through the situation with the Lord, grace and forgiveness may flow, and a sense of divine love may grow.

We probably won't like or agree with everything our parents did, but only a fool despises his parents.

Prov 15:20.      A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish man despises his mother.

### 12. ANIMAL MAGIC

In our modern Western society the rights of animals and the question of man's prerogative to farm or hunt them is often being raised in the media. There has been increasing larger and more vocal proportion of society seeking to change what has been the traditional thought on these issues. These activists have sought to ban scientific experimentation performed on animals, ban the farming of animals for their fur and to ban hunting of animals for sport.

It is probably true that prior to this attention, little public scrutiny was performed on the manner in which animals were farmed or used in tests. Perhaps the general attitude was, "as long as we benefit from the research, we won't ask any questions concerning how the products came about".

Much of the activist's philosophy is based in New Age teaching and Eastern religions.

Every now and then when society gains a reformed conscience on a relevant issue, the church is expected to share this new point-of-view and "come aboard". This was the case during the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

But what should Christians' believe on this subject or phrased correctly, what does the Bible teach on this subject? There is no section of Scripture that clearly teaches or commands on this subject, rather we are going to have to search through Biblical principles and draw conclusions from these.

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<sup>39</sup> Prov 20:20 Whoever curses his father or his mother, His lamp will be put out in deep darkness.

<sup>40</sup> Prov 28:24 Whoever robs his father or his mother, And says, "It is no transgression," The same is companion to a destroyer.

<sup>41</sup> Prov 10:1 The Proverbs of Solomon: A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the grief of his mother.

Prov 15:20 A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish man despises his mother.

Prov 23:24.      The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, and he who begets a wise child will delight in him.

## 12.1. DOMINION

Gen 1:26-28. Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." {27} So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. {28} Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

The Genesis account describes how God placed man in a position of dominion over all living creatures of the earth, and for this purpose He made us in His own image. This exercise was to be used in order to subdue creation. By subdue we understand that animals are to be tamed, controlled and utilised. The above verses clearly show that although we have a privileged position of dominion, we are to exercise it in a God-like manner (in His likeness). Creation and in particular animals are a resource to be managed and used as humans see fit. When mankind exercises dominion over creation in a Godly way, the blessing of God comes on the situation and fruitfulness and multiplication results.

It is God who first gave the skin of an animal for clothing for man.

Gen 3:21. Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.

Following the flood God affirmed man's dominion in creation and also gave "clean" animals for food to people.

Gen 9:1-3. So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. {2} "And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. {3} "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs.

The Psalmist comments on man's dominion:

Psa 8:6-8. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; you have put all things under his feet, {7} all sheep and oxen; even the beasts of the field, {8} the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas.

Such an understanding is at variance with the New-Age philosophy which is spreading through our culture. In this philosophy (and in Eastern Religious thinking) animals are declared equal people, and in some cases worshipped.

Rom 1:25. who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Those who have accepted this lie have been responsible for acts of terrorism against their fellow men, in order to pursue the concept of animal rights.

## 12.2. RESPONSIBILITY

Having been given dominion humanity is also responsible before God as stewards of HIS creation. We are accountable to God for how we exercise this dominion over animals and creation as a whole. Various commandments illustrate how expects men to be agents of conservation, caring for that which is under our control.

Deut 22:6-7. "If a bird's nest happens to be before you along the way, in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs, with the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young; {7} "you shall surely let the mother go, and take the young for yourself, that it may be well with you and that you may prolong your days.

Caring for our environment in a Godly way not only brings the blessing of God, but is also for our own benefit – that it may be well with you.

Care for animals is of such importance that the law demanded that it was shown even to the possession of an enemy.

Exo 23:5. "If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it.

The “fear of the Lord” suggests that we treat animals as God their Creator would treat them.

For example, we know that God has an interest in the preservation of species, as demonstrated in the flood<sup>42</sup>. Those animals which a small, insignificant and plenteous to us, and nevertheless watched over by God.

Luke 12:6. "Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God.

God is also concerned that farm and work animals be cared for properly.

Exo 23:12. "Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed.

Deut 22:4. "You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fall down along the road, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely help him lift them up again.

Deut 25:4. "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.

## 12.3. ANIMAL RIGHTS

Prov 12:10. A righteous man regards the life of his animal, but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.

Another principle that Scripture affirms is that animals do have certain God-given rights. For example, the Lord regards a person’s care and concern for the life of an animal as righteousness, while cruelty to an animal is an act of wickedness. The point is that animals have a right to be treated with wisdom and kindness, not cruelty.

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<sup>42</sup> Gen 8:1 Then God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the animals that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters subsided.

#### 12.4. GOD'S INVOLVEMENT

Psa 24:1. The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.

Not only does Scripture clearly define God's ownership of creation but it also describes how God is at work in the world through design and provision. In this way we see that mankind is meant to be co-labourers with God in the care of the Creation. Scripture also describe how creatures wait upon God and call out to Him for their needs.

Psa 104:14. He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the service of man, that he may bring forth food from the earth,

Psa 104:20-28. You make darkness, and it is night, in which all the beasts of the forest creep about. {21} The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their food from God. {22} When the sun rises, they gather together and lie down in their dens. {23} Man goes out to his work and to his labour until the evening. {24} O LORD, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions; {25} This great and wide sea, in which are innumerable teeming things, living things both small and great. {26} There the ships sail about; there is that Leviathan Which You have made to play there. {27} These all wait for You, that You may give them their food in due season. {28} What You give them they gather in; you open Your hand, they are filled with good.

Psa 147:7-9. Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praises on the harp to our God, {8} Who covers the heavens with clouds, who prepares rain for the earth, who makes grass to grow on the mountains. {9} He gives to the beast its food, and to the young ravens that cry.

The Bible encourages us to study nature and consider the lessons that God has placed there for us to learn from. Jesus said:

Luke 12:27. Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Luke 12:24. Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds?

We see that Jesus describes how God actively feeds the ravens. Job describes how the creation can teach us. Biblical wisdom recognises that "the hand of the Lord has done this".

Job 12:7-9. But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you; and the birds of the air, and they will tell you; {8} Or speak to the earth, and it will teach you; and the fish of the sea will explain to you. {9} Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this,

#### 12.5. LEARNING FROM LITTLE CREATURES

God has always left a testimony to Himself within Creation.

Rom 1:18-20. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, {19} because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. {20} For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,

People say they that are atheists, that they don't believe, or that they are agnostic, they don't know, they're not sure. But there was a time when they did know; inherently they knew that there was a sovereign, righteous creator - because God had shown it to them. But by choosing to suppress the truth, they became ignorant. People seek to blot out the image of this righteous Creator from their conscience and mind, but in doing so their own character becomes more corrupt.

Creation is the first revelation of the superiority and power of God. This was followed by the law, which revealed God's holiness, righteousness and justice. This was followed by Christ, who was full of grace and truth.

Proverbs describe a number of seemingly insignificant creatures which have a great deal to teach us concerning wisdom.

Prov 30:24-28. There are four things which are little on the earth, but they are exceedingly wise: {25} The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their food in the summer; {26} The rock badgers are a feeble folk, yet they make their homes in the crags; {27} The locusts have no king, yet they all advance in ranks; {28} The spider skilfully grasps with its hands, and it is in kings' palaces.

### 12.5.1. Ants

Prov 30:25. The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their food in the summer

Individually ants are not impressive and yet they cooperate to form an advanced and complicated society, within which each is sustained by the whole, and has a part to play in the work of the colony. They demonstrate discipline, organisation and industry, planning in advance for the long winter months by storing up food in the summer.

The wisdom shown by ants is an example to those who are lazy and unproductive.

Prov 6:6-8. Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, {7} which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, {8} Provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest.

Unlike a lot of people, who need to be watched by an overseer in order to pull their weight, ants work hard on their own initiative.

### 12.5.2. Rock Badgers

Prov 30:26. The rock badgers are a feeble folk, yet they make their homes in the crags;

Rock badgers are not the common badger we have in the UK. They are also known as hyrax or conies. These are commended for building safe and secure nests in the strongholds of rocks, thus compensating for their own feebleness. It takes Godly wisdom, diligence and care to build a safe and secure home, where all the inhabitants and safe and can flourish.

Spiritually it is wise to build our lives upon the firm foundation of God's word, and to hide ourselves in the Rock of Ages. David cried:

Psa 61:1-4. HEAR my cry, O God; attend to my prayer. {2} From the end of the earth I will cry to You, when my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the rock that is higher than I. {3} For You have been a shelter for me, a strong tower from the enemy. {4} I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings. Selah

### 12.5.3. Locusts

Prov 30:27. The locusts have no king, yet they all advance in ranks;

Another creature that demonstrates social organisation, and working toward a common purpose is the locust. These do not need a king to rally them to battle, but nations fear when invaded by their armies.

The prophet Joel describes the Lord sending an army of locusts against His backslidden people.

Joel 2:4-11. Their appearance is like the appearance of horses<sup>43</sup>; and like swift steeds, so they run. {5} With a noise like chariots over mountaintops they leap, like the noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble, like a strong people set in battle array. {6} Before them the people writhe in pain; all faces are drained of colour. {7} They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like men of war; every one marches in formation, and they do not break ranks. {8} They do not push one another; every one marches in his own column. Though they lunge between the weapons, they are not cut down. {9} They run to and fro in the city, they run on the wall; they climb into the houses, they enter at the windows like a thief. {10} The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble; the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness. {11} The LORD gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great; for strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; who can endure it?

### 12.5.4. Spiders

The final small creature described in Proverbs 30 is the spider.

Prov 30:28. The spider skilfully grasps with its hands, and it is in kings' palaces.

Spiders are commended for their use of skilfulness. They build their intricate webs with perseverance and are found everywhere, even in king's palaces.

Applying diligence and care in all we do and seeking to achieve a standard of excellence is commendable for believers who are called to do everything us unto the Lord. Such an attitude gets noticed in the work place and can bring forth promotion. Those who give themselves to developing their skills will always excel before those who always seek the easiest path.

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<sup>43</sup> The likeness of a locust to a horse, especially to a horse equipped with armour, is so striking that the insect is named in German Heupferd (hay-horse), and in Italian Cavaletta (little horse)."

## 13. WORK

### 13.1. GOD'S DESIGN

Gen 2:2-3. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. {3} Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

Work is God's idea and design, and is fundamental to God's creational plan, as is a day of rest. God reviewed his work and declared it to be very good. These first six days are not the only time God is seen to have worked. Jesus declared:

John 5:17. ... "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working."

A result of the fall Adam's the tilling of the ground would become hard work as the ground was cursed and became uncooperative. This should be seen as creation groaning under sin rather than God cursing all human work.<sup>44</sup> As much as possible God wants our labour to be purposeful, fulfilling and satisfying.

God did not rest on the seventh day because He was tired, or had need to recuperate. The purpose of His rest was to enjoy His creation. The Sabbath rest was created before work became hard and tiresome (Gen 3:17-18), indicating the principal of the Sabbath is not recuperation from exhaustion, but rather enjoyment - it is a festival.

The New Testament confirms the importance of work.

1 Thes 4:10-12. ... But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; {11} that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, {12} that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.

2 Thes 3:10-13. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. {11} For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. {12} Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. {13} But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.

Not only is work that which is necessary to meet our needs, but also the labour that as a believer we are each called to diligently pursue.

Heb 6:10-12. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labour of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. {11} And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, {12} that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Titus 3:1. Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work,

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<sup>44</sup> Rom 8:19-22 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. {20} For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; {21} because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. {22} For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now.

1 Tim 5:9-10. Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, {10} well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.

### 13.2. KINGDOM MINDED

Ecc1 9:11. I returned and saw under the sun that; the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all.

Much of what we do in this life is temporal, producing no lasting fruit. Also since time and chance happen to all men, all our work and planning can be suddenly dashed by the unexpected. This is the result of living in a fallen world. If our view of success and achievement is solely based upon this world's values, we will surely become depressed and despondent.

This was certainly what happened to Solomon:

Ecc1 2:10-11. ... For my heart rejoiced in all my labour; and this was my reward from all my labour. {11} Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labour in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.

Ecc1 2:18-19. Then I hated all my labour in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me. {19} and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labour in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity.

If we live for our work, our career, our prestige or for fame and fortune, we too will end up bitter and disappointed. When viewed in isolation all our work, our best efforts they mean nothing, they are vanity. Our finest monuments will one day be pulled down to make way for somebody else's.

The answer is to realize that as important and fulfilling work may be it is temporal and only a means to an end. There is no complete satisfaction or peace found outside the kingdom of God. Our heart needs to be fixed on eternal things.

John 6:27. Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him."

Mat 6:19-21. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; {20} but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. {21} "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Even when life's circumstances seem to reduce our efforts to a pile of dust, and everything seems to have been a waste of time, we can still be assured that those things done for and in God are noted and will be rewarded.

Isa 49:4. Then I said, 'I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain; Yet surely my just reward is with the LORD, And my work with my God.'"

Heb 6:10. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labour of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

### 13.3. INVOLVE GOD

An important principle for all of our efforts, including our work, is to involve God. This should start at the planning stage, and then every step of the way should be covered with prayer. Sadly many people only pray when things go wrong.

Prov 16:3. Commit your works to the LORD, and your thoughts will be established.

Psa 127:1-2. Unless the LORD builds the house, they labour in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. {2} It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so He gives His beloved sleep.

Man's best efforts, his organisation, administration, and managerial skills are all vanity, if the Lord is left out of the equation. This verse could be stated in the positive: When the Lord builds the house, they that labour, labour with hope.

### 13.4. KNOW THE WILL OF GOD

Psa 33:15. He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works.

Exo 31:2-6. See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. {3} And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, {4} to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, {5} in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship. {6} And I, indeed I, have appointed with him Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have put wisdom in the hearts of all who are gifted artisans, that they may make all that I have commanded you:

When God created us he gave us each differing and particular gifts and abilities, as well as specific characteristics. In order to live a fulfilled life we need to recognise our abilities and seek for ways to utilise them. Otherwise we can end up as a square peg in a round hole, feeling ill-equipped and unfulfilled.

If we try and work against our character and gifts, even in the “work of the Lord” we will be frustrated and will find it such as effort that we could not do it joyfully or wholeheartedly.

We should also recognise that God wants us to use our gifts for his intended purposes, and that true fulfilment is only found when we marry our abilities to the will of God.

### 13.5. HONOUR GOD

We may remember to pray when things go badly, but do we remember to praise God when things go well.

Deut 8:11-18. "Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, {12} "lest; when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; {13} "and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; {14} "when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; {15} "who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; {16} "who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end; {17} "then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.' {18} "And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

It is wise to always give God the glory and to honour God with the pay that we receive from work.

Prov 3:9-10. Honour the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; {10} So your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.

### 13.6. WORK HARD

It is observable that God has often called men to places of dignity and honour when they have busy and honest employment of their vocation. Saul was seeking his father's donkeys and David his father's sheep when called to the Kingdom. The shepherds were feeding their flocks when they had their glorious revelation. God called the four apostles from their fishing and Matthew from collecting taxes, Amos from the horsemen of Tecoaah, Moses from keeping Jethro's sheep, Gideon from the threshing floor, Elisha from the ploughs. God never called a lazy man. God never encourages idleness and will not despise persons in the lowest employment. *D. L. Moody*<sup>45</sup>

Deut 8:18. "And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

It is natural to want to provide for ourselves, to make wealth and to be successful in our endeavours. This is a good motivation and is not sin so long as the desire is subservient to God's will for our lives. Many of us may be familiar with teaching that condemns ambition, but Scripture commends Godly ambition, but warns us against selfish ambition.

Phil 2:3. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

The wisdom books commend an industrious attitude and frown upon laziness.

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<sup>45</sup>Morgan, R. J. (2000). *Nelson's complete book of stories, illustrations, and quotes* (electronic ed.) (Page 800). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

- Prov 12:11. He who tills his land will be satisfied with bread, but he who follows frivolity is devoid of understanding.
- Prov 12:14. A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth, and the recompense of a man's hands will be rendered to him.
- Prov 12:27. The lazy man does not roast what he took in hunting, but diligence is man's precious possession.
- Prov 14:23. In all labour there is profit, but idle chatter leads only to poverty.
- Prov 16:26. The person who labours, labours for himself, for his hungry mouth drives him on.
- Prov 20:13. Do not love sleep, lest you come to poverty; open your eyes, and you will be satisfied with bread.
- Eccl 2:24. Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labour. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.
- Eccl 3:13. and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labour; it is the gift of God.

Although there is value in hard work and it brings good reward, we do have to ask ourselves how hard is work supposed to be? Scripture clearly teaches there is a balance between working hard and resting. Not only is the Sabbath a commanded rest, but there were statutory holidays within the Mosaic Law.

We are out of balance in life when we either over emphasis one thing or we under emphasis the same thing. Wisdom is knowing the balance, and then no condemning ourselves when because of peculiar circumstances we are unable to maintain that balance.

### 13.7. WORK WISELY

In addition to work hard, the Wisdom Books encourages us to work wisely. Some times it is not harder work, or longer work we need to apply, but wiser work.

- Eccl 10:10. If the axe is dull, and one does not sharpen the edge, then he must use more strength; but wisdom brings success.

Some people can kill themselves with sustained effort, and feel frustrated with God that success is not being achieved, when what they need is to listen to a word of wisdom from God.

- Prov 24:3-6. Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; {4} By knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches. {5} A wise man is strong, yes, a man of knowledge increases strength; {6} For by wise counsel you will wage your own war, and in a multitude of counsellors there is safety.

A modern phrase which captures the theme of Proverbs is: "Work smarter, not harder".

One way in which we work smarter is to consider long-term outcomes rather than concentrating on short-term gains.

- Prov 20:21. An inheritance gained hastily at the beginning will not be blessed at the end.
- Prov 21:5. The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty.

### 13.8. BE DILIGENT

It is wise to learn and practice diligence in life and avoid the pitfalls of laziness. A lack of diligence can mean that all our efforts come to nothing.

Prov 13:4. The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich.

Prov 12:24. The hand of the diligent will rule, but the lazy man will be put to forced labour.

Prov 14:23. In all labour there is profit, But idle chatter leads only to poverty.

It is sometimes said that the difference between success and failure is determined by how badly one wants to succeed. Ambition is a factor in determining what investments and sacrifices someone will make in order to achieve their goal, yet desire alone is not sufficient to ensure success. Diligence, taking care of the detail, is also required.

### 13.9. AN ATTITUDE OF EXCELLENCE

The path to success and fulfilment is to develop excellence in our skills and performance. This might mean sacrificing in order to train and develop skills. Remember God does give wealth, but the power to make wealth.

Excellence in our work brings reward.

Prov 22:29. Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before unknown men.

For believers excellence is also required because we are to do all things as unto the Lord.

Col 3:22-25. Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. {23} And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, {24} knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. {25} But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.

Whatever we do, we can do it as unto the Lord. Some things in life are necessities. If we view them as a chore, we will do them reluctantly and shall probably not do a view good job. If we realise that even the mundane and everyday is an opportunity to worship God and share fellowship with the Almighty then our attitude changes and the task can become a delight.

We can do everything as unto the Lord. Wash our car, cut the lawn, clean the house, do the ironing etc. It is our attitude that determines whether these things are spiritual or not. They can be done as an act of worship.

Titus 2:9-10. Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, {10} not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savoir in all things.

These two verses of Paul's letter to Titus outline some important principles:

- Obedient

We are to recognise and submit to authority

- Well pleasing

We are to demonstrate an excellence attitude.

- Not answering back

We are to avoid conflict

- Not pilfering

We should be seen to be honest people full of integrity.

- Good fidelity

We should be loyal and dependable.

Those who demonstrate a spirit of excellence are employable and liable for promotion. They are also a good witness to the Gospel of Christ.

### 13.10. INTEGRITY

There are many in society who seek to gain by dishonest means. They steal or lie or use immoral methods to gain from others. Believers must recognise that blessing only comes when we work within God's righteous requirements.

Prov 13:11. Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished, but he who gathers by labour will increase.

Prov 16:11. Honest weights and scales are the Lord's; all the weights in the bag are His work.

Prov 20:10. Diverse weights and diverse measures, they are both alike, an abomination to the LORD.

Prov 20:17. Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel.

Prov 20:23. Diverse weights are an abomination to the LORD, and dishonest scales are not good.

### 14. DEADLY DESIRES

Prov 14:12. There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.<sup>46</sup>

The wisdom of Proverbs warns us all to be aware of illicit and dangerous desires, lusts and temptations. This wisdom encourages us not to look at the short term gain or pleasure, but to consider the long term effects of making choices which are neither righteous or godly. Proverbs 14:12 warns us that we can be easily deceived, the things which look right to human ingenuity can be fatally wrong. Jesus warns us that easy, obvious and popular choices may be leading to destruction.

Mat 7:13-14. "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. {14} "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

We therefore need to carefully consider that choices we make, and seek to be ever learning and reminding ourselves of the Wisdom within God's word.

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<sup>46</sup> Also Prov 16:25. There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

### 14.1. QUICK FIXES AND QUICK GAIN

Proverbs warns us that lusting for things we don't possess is bound to result in disappointment.

Prov 23:5. Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven.

We live in a hurried society. People enjoy the benefits of fast food, instant coffee, rapid microwaves and efficient transport systems. Yet despite all these time saving devices we actually have greater pressure on our time than perhaps ever before.

It is therefore easy to forget that in God's created order, many things require time to bear fruit, to ripen and to mature. In this natural rhythm people too are required to invest time, effort and resource in the hope of receiving a reward some time in the future.

But in this generation people are no longer content to make plans for the future, work towards those goals and wait patiently for the outcome of their labours. Society wants instant fixes to its problems and people want instant gratification. People expect their politicians to produce instant solutions to the modern ills – and at no extra cost. Our children are learning that they do not have to wait for anything. If they beg and cry long enough someone will capitulate and buy their silence.

The individual's expectations have risen astronomically, items once termed luxuries are now considered to be necessities and people demand them as rights – something that Social Services should supply. People want that new possession now, they need it straight away. Their lust for the new things becomes their overriding passion. Waiting to save for a new item is seen as an unreasonable and unbearable option, were as taking on mountains of debt to pacify the impatient craving is no longer thought unwise, or of any consequence.

We see this cultural craving for instant gratification in attitudes towards food, sex, travel, fun, and achievement. We want everything; we feel entitled to everything, and we want it right now! People are really lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God<sup>47</sup>.

This epidemic within society is nothing more than unrestrained covetousness, and no good ever came from breaking one of the Ten Commandments<sup>48</sup>. Covetousness has been called the "Mother of All Sins", since it is covetousness that causes people to steal or to commit adultery.

Prov 21:25-26. The desire of the lazy man kills him, for his hands refuse to labour. {26} He covets greedily all day long, but the righteous gives and does not spare.

The picture is of a dysfunctional body. The eyes see, the heart craves for, but the hands refuse to work. As a result the person spends his days dreaming of what he wants, but never working towards achieving any goals. His life's self-orientated and as a result he is unwilling to share with anyone who is in need. The righteous in comparison are willing to give, because money and possessions are not their idol.

Covetousness tempts many people to steal things they can't afford or won't wait for. Those who yield to this temptation fail to realize that stealing brings a curse into your life.

Prov 13:11. Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished, but he who gathers by labour will increase.

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<sup>47</sup> 2 Tim 3:4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,

<sup>48</sup> Exo 20:17. You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbour's.

Zech 5:3-4. Then he said to me, "This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole earth: 'Every thief shall be expelled,' according to this side of the scroll; and, 'Every perjurer shall be expelled,' according to that side of it." {4} "I will send out the curse," says the LORD of hosts; "It shall enter the house of the thief and the house of the one who swears falsely by My name. It shall remain in the midst of his house and consume it, with its timber and stones."

Quick fixes and fast answers are described as “folly and shame”.

Prov 18:13. He who answers a matter before he hears it, It is folly and shame to him.

## 14.2. THE BEGINNINGS OF LUST

2 Sam 11:1-3. It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. {2} Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. {3} So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"

Lust is a strong craving, but it starts off appearing much smaller, less ambitious and controllable. Lust is sown into our lives through intrigue, a question in our mind. Perhaps the mind was startled by seeing something that was outstanding, rare, or illicit. We didn't mean to gaze, but we couldn't believe what we were seeing. There is no obvious sense of wanting to experience or own what we gaze at, it just caught our eye. But once the eye is trapped the carnal nature will soon follow. Now we find allurements begin to draw us in. We want to get closer and look longer. We are being enticed. A picture is developing in the mind. A repeated thought process is being rehearsed.

Lust is growing stronger, and its will is to totally dominate our life. It seeks to open a wide a door as possible for sin to enter in. Lust will ally with the carnal nature so that its demands feel natural, normal, healthy and good. The world uses phrases such as “To deny these passions is to deny what makes us truly human”.

## 14.3. EFFECTS OF LUST

Psa 106:14-15. But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tested God in the desert. {15} And He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul.

Lust brings people low, making them smaller people unable to fulfil their potential. It hardens the heart and brings poverty of spirit.

Prov 11:6. The righteousness of the upright will deliver them, but the unfaithful will be caught by their lust.

Lust is a trap which ensnares those who enjoy its rich wine.

Mat 5:28. "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

2 Pet 1:4. ... having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Lust is sin and as such is addictive, corrupts the soul and spawns death.

Rom 1:27. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

Lust has an agenda, and its aim is not to give people pleasure or satisfaction. Instead Lust seeks to bring people into bondage, distort their character and to open them up to the demonic.

1 John 2:16-17. For all that is in the world; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; is not of the Father but is of the world. {17} And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

Gal 5:16-17. I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. {17} For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Lust is anti-God. It wars against the image of God in us, our knowledge of God and hardens people's spiritual hearing.

#### 14.4. SEXUAL LUST

In its search for instant and cheap pleasure, society's sexual morals have been decaying rapidly. To many it is no longer necessary to even be in a relationship with someone before engaging in sexual intercourse. People want the pleasure, without any commitment. But instead of being fulfilled or satisfied, people are left feeling used, dirty and alone.

How far short this falls from God's creative purpose, where a husband and wife become one flesh.

Quick, illicit sex will result in long-term penalties.

Prov 5:3-6. For the lips of an immoral woman drip honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil; {4} But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, Sharp as a two-edged sword. {5} Her feet go down to death, Her steps lay hold of hell. {6} Lest you ponder her path of life; Her ways are unstable; You do not know them.

Prov 6:25. Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, nor let her allure you with her eyelids.

Prov 31:30. Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.

1 Cor 10:6. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.

Righteous Job knew the dangers of sexual lust and the value of self examination.

Job 31:9-12. "If my heart has been enticed by a woman, Or if I have lurked at my neighbour's door, {10} Then let my wife grind for another, And let others bow down over her. {11} For that would be wickedness; Yes, it would be iniquity deserving of judgment. {12} For that would be a fire that consumes to destruction, And would root out all my increase.

Job 31:1-4. "I have made a covenant with my eyes; Why then should I look upon a young woman? {2} For what is the allotment of God from above, And the inheritance of the Almighty from on high? {3} Is it not destruction for the wicked, And disaster for the workers of iniquity? {4} Does He not see my ways, And count all my steps?

## 14.5. COMPLAINING AGAINST GOD

In their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, the Children of Israel continually complained against the Lord's supply to them. They failed to realize that the journey through the wilderness was a temporary experience designed to bring them to a Land flowing with milk and honey.

Exo 16:3. And the children of Israel said to them, "Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

The people appear to prefer to have plenty of meat on the plate and be dead, rather than be alive and trusting in God. We all say and think stupid things at times. God answered their cry and sent manna for them to eat. But they failed to understand they He had allowed there need to test what was in their heart.

Later they would complain about the manna. The seat of their complaining was their "intense craving".

Num 11:4-6. Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: "Who will give us meat to eat? {5} "We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; {6} "but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!"

God supplied them with meat, but they received a lot more than they bargained for.

Num 11:18-20. "Then you shall say to the people, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the hearing of the LORD, saying, "Who will give us meat to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt." Therefore the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat. {19} 'You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, {20} 'but for a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised the LORD who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, "Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?"' "

The answer came.

Num 11:31-34. Now a wind went out from the LORD, and it brought quail from the sea and left them fluttering near the camp, about a day's journey on this side and about a day's journey on the other side, all around the camp, and about two cubits above the surface of the ground. {32} And the people stayed up all that day, all night, and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers); and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp.

{33} But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was aroused against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague. {34} So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving.

Such is sin and lust. They offer so much, they entice and cause an intense hunger. But the item they focus on turns to dust and causes death. Kibroth Hattaavah means Graves of Lust.<sup>49</sup>

## 15. PRUDENCE

Prudence is a beautiful world which unfortunately is no longer heard much in today's world, and is little understood. It means:

1. Discretion in practical affairs
2. Knowing how to avoid embarrassment or distress

As such prudence is a form of wisdom and the opposites of prudence would be foolishness and recklessness. When Solomon declared his purpose in writing Proverbs, he stated:

Prov 1:4. To give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion;

When Wisdom is personified, she declares:

Prov 8:12. "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge and discretion.

Prudence is one of the out-workings of life that has stored up wisdom.

Prov 16:21. The wise in heart will be called prudent, and sweetness of the lips increases learning.

### 15.1. SELF CONTROL

A prudent man learns to control himself and in doing so saves himself a lot of embarrassment.

Prov 12:16. A fool's wrath is known at once, but a prudent man covers shame.

### 15.2. SLOW TO SPEAK

Fools rush in and the fool is quick to open his mouth. The prudent man knows that there is an opportune time to say the right thing. To do so at the wrong time can have disappointing or even disastrous results.

Prov 12:23. A prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of fools proclaims foolishness.

Prov 13:16. Every prudent man acts with knowledge, but a fool lays open his folly.

### 15.3. MONITORS HIS WAY

The fool deceives himself about his own state and the way he is taking. Instead of carefully considering the way he takes he

Prov 14:8. The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way, but the folly of fools is deceit.

Prov 14:15. The simple believes every word, but the prudent considers well his steps.

Prov 14:18. The simple inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.

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<sup>49</sup> Psa 78:30-31. They were not deprived of their craving; But while their food was still in their mouths, {31} The wrath of God came against them, And slew the stoutest of them, And struck down the choice men of Israel.

#### 15.4. LEARNS FROM REBUKE

Prov 15:5. A fool despises his father's instruction, but he who receives correction is prudent.

#### 15.5. SEEKS TO KEEP LEARNING

Prov 18:15. The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.

Prov 19:14. Houses and riches are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD.

#### 15.6. UNDERSTANDS TIMES AND SEASONS

Prov 22:3. A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished.

Prov 27:12. A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself; the simple pass on and are punished.

### 16. FRIENDSHIP

Relationships are a critical part of our life and it is important that the way we approach relationships is firstly Godly and secondly is wise.

The primary commandment with regard to earthly relationships is:

Mat 22:39. ... 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'<sup>50</sup>

Jesus summarized the law and the prophets by saying:

Mat 7:12. "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

God's way is totally opposite to the world's way. The world says, do back what they do to you. God's way says do first to them what you want them to do to you. Put another way, sow what you want to reap. It won't work with everyone, but you shall reap a harvest, and you shall please God.

The book of Proverbs has a number of points of wisdom which would do us well to embrace.

We shall simply run through each of the relevant Proverbs in order, making comments as we go.

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Prov 3:28-29. Do not say to your neighbour, "Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it," When you have it with you. {29} Do not devise evil against your neighbour, For he dwells by you for safety's sake.

Being a neighbour brings responsibilities, and in fulfilling those we are to demonstrate a godly attitude. Jesus said we are to be like of Father in heaven, who is good to all people.

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<sup>50</sup> Lev 19:18 'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD.

Mat 5:45. "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Prov 6:1-5. My son, if you become surety for your friend, If you have shaken hands in pledge for a stranger, {2} You are snared by the words of your mouth; You are taken by the words of your mouth. {3} So do this, my son, and deliver yourself; For you have come into the hand of your friend: Go and humble yourself; Plead with your friend. {4} Give no sleep to your eyes, Nor slumber to your eyelids. {5} Deliver yourself like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, And like a bird from the hand of the fowler.

Friendship does not mean that we act foolishly and allow others abuse us or allow them to put us in a position in which we are uncomfortable. Sometimes fear of giving offence means we allow ourselves to be manipulated and controlled. A true friend would not wish to put us in such a compromising position.

A very similar proverb is:

Prov 17:18. A man devoid of understanding shakes hands in a pledge, and becomes surety for his friend.

Prov 12:26. The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray.

Do we let people choose us as friends, or do we show some discernment. True friends never expect us to forsake our conscience or our own will.

Prov 13:20. He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed.

For our own long term health and safety, there are those people whom we should not allow to get close, or be associated with. This is a situation where we need spiritual discernment, to know what is in a man.

John 2:23-25. Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. {24} But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, {25} and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

The Holy Spirit will lead us who to share with and who to witness to.

Prov 14:20. The poor man is hated even by his own neighbour, but the rich has many friends.

This verse describes typical human nature. It stands in contrast to the way believers should act.

James 2:1-4. My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. {2} For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, {3} and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," {4} have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

Prov 16:28. A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends.

If we are going to keep our friends then we must be extremely careful about what we say.

Prov 17:9. He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends.

Forgiveness is going to be needed at some time in every relationship. When it is our turn to forgive, we should forgive, forget and move on. Rehearsing the events will only led to more strife.

Prov 17:17. A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Real friends stick around in times of trouble, where as fair-weather friends are there to enjoy the good times. Jesus described those who would be blessed by God:

Mat 25:34-36. "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: {35} 'for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; {36} 'I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

The blessed where true friends even when people are in need or outcast.

This proverb mentions brothers. Rather than contrasting brothers with friends, the writer uses the two phrases in a literary device to indicate that life does have seasons of adversity, and we are all going to need help from others to get through such times.

Later on Solomon will make some interesting contrasts between brothers and friends.

Prov 18:24. A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Meaning friendship doesn't just happen, it has to be developed and nurtured. That takes commitment and time. It costs to maintain good friendships, which is one reason why no one can have a large number of very close friends. Another reason is that there has to be compatibility of character and interests, and that isn't always to find.

In our "instant society" people want microwave friendships, which require low maintenance and little time or communication. It doesn't work.

A man, sir, should keep his friendships in a state of constant repair.<sup>51</sup>

You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.<sup>52</sup>

Psa 55:14. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in the throng.

There is no finer subject to talk about than Jesus. Let of conversations be meaningful, about the things of God.

Prov 19:4. Wealth makes many friends, But the poor is separated from his friend.

We must be willing to share with our friends. Jesus told a parable of how a steward was wise in using temporal wealth to make friends. He concluded in saying:

Luke 16:9. "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.

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<sup>51</sup> Samuel Johnson

<sup>52</sup> Dale Carnegie, *How To Win Friends and Influence People* (1936).

Prov 19:6-7. Many entreat the favour of the nobility, and every man is a friend to one who gives gifts. {7} All the brothers of the poor hate him; How much more do his friends go far from him! He may pursue them with words, yet they abandon him.

Nevertheless we must be careful to ensure that our generosity does not attract scroungers and those who will take us for granted. A true friend reciprocates in kind. Good friends are made not bought. It requires the investment of time.

Prov 22:11. He who loves purity of heart and has grace on his lips, The king will be his friend.

Our character is a prime thing in attracting and keeping friends. It is no use being helpful or generous, if our speech is not seasoned with salt<sup>53</sup>. Our conversation should build up other people, making the time they spend with us enjoyable.

He who sows courtesy reaps friendship, and he who plants kindness gathers love. — Saint Basil (A.D. 330–379)<sup>54</sup>

Despite his great insights into the human mind, Sigmund Freud died at the age of eighty-three, a bitter and disillusioned old man who proved unable to sustain his friendships. He wrote in 1918, “I have found little that is good about human beings on the whole. In my experience most of them are trash...”<sup>55</sup>

I suspect that this man had reaped what he had sown.

Prov 22:24. Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go,

We must be careful who we are close to. Some people would lead us into trouble, and eventually their anger would be displayed towards us.

Prov 25:17. Seldom set foot in your neighbour's house, lest he become weary of you and hate you.

We have already seen that deep friendships require a quantity of quality time. However we must also guard against becoming intrusive. If we are always popping in or always calling up, we can very quickly wear out our welcome. Why are we calling so regularly? Is it to meet a need in our own life, without consideration of what the other person wants or needs? Perhaps we are insecure, afraid or lonely. We should not allow our perceived need spoil our relationships.

Good friendships work on give and take; supply mutual needs.

Prov 27:6. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

Friendship is like a bank account, there has to be large deposits before there can be a withdrawal. When there are sufficient funds, when a high level of trust has been established, then friendship can move deeper than companionship. Proven friendships can be trusted to be objective.

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<sup>53</sup> Col 4:6. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

<sup>54</sup> *Nelson's complete book of stories, illustrations, and quotes*

<sup>55</sup> Morgan, R. J. *Nelson's complete book of stories, illustrations, and quotes*.

This is something that Solomon's father, David, had learned with his friend Nathan<sup>56</sup>. A related proverb is:

Prov 28:23. He who rebukes a man will find more favour afterward than he who flatters with the tongue.

Prov 27:9. Ointment and perfume delight the heart, and the sweetness of a man's friend gives delight by hearty counsel.

We communicate with different people at differing levels. The closer the friend the deeper and more valuable the communion.

Prov 27:10. Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend, nor go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity; better is a neighbour nearby than a brother far away.

We need to show faithfulness, particularly when someone are going through bad times. I have heard people say how when serious long term illness has come, how it affects the way their friends react. At first people show concern, but they soon become scarce.

In this verse Solomon makes mention of the limits of family ties. He had seen a lot of troubles amongst his own brothers, even to the point of fratricide. There may be an obligation between blood relatives, but if there has been no communication or investment of time in the relationship, it can't be relied upon when trouble strikes. "They only contact us when they are in trouble".

Sometimes there is a lot of history that gets in the way of siblings being close. Without there being forgiveness, the effect of the past cannot be unravelled.

Prov 27:14. He who blesses his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, It will be counted a curse to him.

Even a blessing spoken in an insensitive way, at an inappropriate time will be "counted a curse". A modern day example would be the use of the telephone. Calling to often, calling to early or to late; all these can tire people out.

Prov 27:17. As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.

Having friends with whom we may be considered equal can produce the best in us. But remember sparks sometimes fly when iron and iron meet. We can really be tested on issues of competitiveness and jealousy.

### 16.1. SCRIPTURAL EXAMPLES

There are a number of examples of friendships in Scripture, some good and some bad.

#### 16.1.1. David & Jonathan

A good model of friendship was the relationship between Jonathan and David. David never knew a kindred spirit like Jonathan, even among his wives. So great was the strength of their relationship that they made a covenant together before the Lord. Both men were honourable men of faith. Jonathan surrendered his own personal ambition in preference to David, knowing that he would be king. He was faithful to David even against his unrighteous father, Saul. When there

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<sup>56</sup> 2 Sam 12:7

was trouble all around, David could rely upon Jonathan. David would later reciprocate by fulfilling his covenant to Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth.

### 16.1.2. Job's Companions

Job thought he had troubles enough, and then his friends turned up to help. His three close friends are renown for their condemnation of faultless Job. This they did to make Job's troubles fit into their faulty theology.

However there are some things we can learn from these three men.

- They did visit their friend when he was in trouble.
- They did intend to mourn with him.
- They did openly weep for him.
- They were willing to sit in silence (seven days), allowing Job to set the agenda.
- They devoted a lot of time to Job.

When people are hurting, they don't want to hear theological discussion as to why their world is falling part. Christians can be masters at offering quaint clichés, which often only cause pain. Just sitting quietly with hurting people can be a great comfort and encouragement to them. They don't need answers, they need care.

### 16.1.3. Four Faithful Friends

The four friends of the paralyzed man where faithful, determined and resourceful (Luke 5).